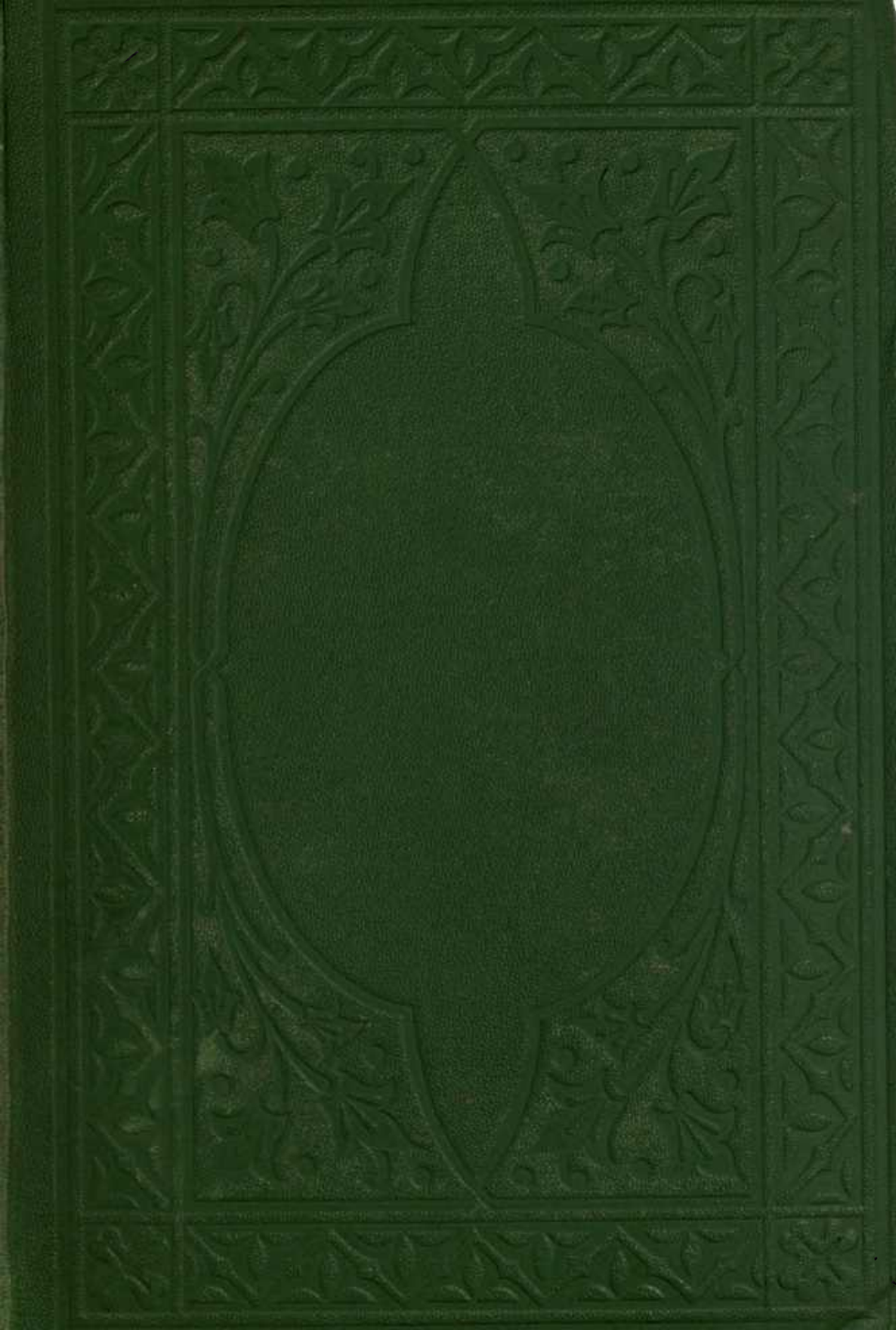








DACIA SINGLETON.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"ALTOGETHER WRONG," "WHAT MONEY CAN'T DO,"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18 CATHERINE ST. STRAND.

1867.



CONTENTS OF VOL. I.



CHAP.	PAGE
I. AUNT AND NIECE	I
II. PACKING UP	23
III. AN UNEXPECTED MEETING	44
IV. A FOOL'S PARADISE	60
V. OPPOSITIONS	73
VI. ACROSS THE CHANNEL	87
VII. A BRITISH PARSON	107
VIII. THE NEW HOME	124
IX. MISS CHORLEY	137
X. A DUNKERQUE SOIREE	153
XI. MARKET-DAY	168
XII. SUNDAY MORNING	190
XIII. THE FIRST VISIT	207
XIV. MRS. THOMAS HAS HER OWN WAY	222
XV. SANCHE'S IMPRESSION IS FAVOURABLE	243
XVI. TOUT POUR MOI, RIEN POUR TOI	256
XVII. CHATTERING CHORLEY'S CHATTERINGS	275
XVIII. CROSSING THE DUNES	295

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

1	THE NEW YORK
2	THE NEW YORK
3	THE NEW YORK
4	THE NEW YORK
5	THE NEW YORK
6	THE NEW YORK
7	THE NEW YORK
8	THE NEW YORK
9	THE NEW YORK
10	THE NEW YORK
11	THE NEW YORK
12	THE NEW YORK
13	THE NEW YORK
14	THE NEW YORK
15	THE NEW YORK
16	THE NEW YORK
17	THE NEW YORK
18	THE NEW YORK
19	THE NEW YORK
20	THE NEW YORK
21	THE NEW YORK
22	THE NEW YORK
23	THE NEW YORK
24	THE NEW YORK
25	THE NEW YORK
26	THE NEW YORK
27	THE NEW YORK
28	THE NEW YORK
29	THE NEW YORK
30	THE NEW YORK
31	THE NEW YORK
32	THE NEW YORK
33	THE NEW YORK
34	THE NEW YORK
35	THE NEW YORK
36	THE NEW YORK
37	THE NEW YORK
38	THE NEW YORK
39	THE NEW YORK
40	THE NEW YORK
41	THE NEW YORK
42	THE NEW YORK
43	THE NEW YORK
44	THE NEW YORK
45	THE NEW YORK
46	THE NEW YORK
47	THE NEW YORK
48	THE NEW YORK
49	THE NEW YORK
50	THE NEW YORK
51	THE NEW YORK
52	THE NEW YORK
53	THE NEW YORK
54	THE NEW YORK
55	THE NEW YORK
56	THE NEW YORK
57	THE NEW YORK
58	THE NEW YORK
59	THE NEW YORK
60	THE NEW YORK
61	THE NEW YORK
62	THE NEW YORK
63	THE NEW YORK
64	THE NEW YORK
65	THE NEW YORK
66	THE NEW YORK
67	THE NEW YORK
68	THE NEW YORK
69	THE NEW YORK
70	THE NEW YORK
71	THE NEW YORK
72	THE NEW YORK
73	THE NEW YORK
74	THE NEW YORK
75	THE NEW YORK
76	THE NEW YORK
77	THE NEW YORK
78	THE NEW YORK
79	THE NEW YORK
80	THE NEW YORK
81	THE NEW YORK
82	THE NEW YORK
83	THE NEW YORK
84	THE NEW YORK
85	THE NEW YORK
86	THE NEW YORK
87	THE NEW YORK
88	THE NEW YORK
89	THE NEW YORK
90	THE NEW YORK
91	THE NEW YORK
92	THE NEW YORK
93	THE NEW YORK
94	THE NEW YORK
95	THE NEW YORK
96	THE NEW YORK
97	THE NEW YORK
98	THE NEW YORK
99	THE NEW YORK
100	THE NEW YORK

DACIA SINGLETON.



CHAPTER I.

AUNT AND NIECE.

“IF you don’t do wrong, don’t do wrong-like, my dear.” Mrs. Ewart spoke to her niece, the Honourable Mrs. Moncrieffe.

“I neither do the one nor the other,” replied the lady so remonstrated with, tossing her pretty head with an impatient gesture; “but you always talk to me, Mum, as if I did not know wrong from right, or as if I always gave preference to the former.”

“Well, Cecily, I think you do. I see very little of the latter in any of your actions, especially lately. Now, my dear, there is no use in

looking cross. Some one ought to tell you the truth. The truth is not always pleasant, I know; but it's none the less wholesome. You have no business to have those cropped-headed, long-bearded foreigners dangling about you all day long. You are too pretty to let men come and sit here, idling away their time and yours too. Now, Cis, don't go off into one of your tempers." Mrs. Moncrieffe showed every disposition to do so. "I don't say there is any actual wrong; but there is a great reflection of it; and the substance will soon appear, if you don't drive away the shadow. Where is James Moncrieffe? What is he about, that he does not look after you better than he seems to do?"

"James, indeed!" And the small well-shaped head was again tossed, but this time with a disdainful air. "James amuses himself his own way, and I mine."

"Yes, that is about the truth. You are both a couple of—forgive me, my dear, if I say—fools; for that is what I mean, and I had best be distinct. You have been married five years, and you have not gained one grain of common sense

during that period; and what little you had, you seem to have lost. Dacia has more sense in her little finger than you have in your whole body.”

“Dacia always had. She was always perfect in your eyes and poor papa’s. If Dacia were not my sister, I think I should hate her.”

Here Mrs. Moncrieffe rose up from a very luxurious chair and walked towards the fire, which, though burning brightly, she seemed to think would be none the worse for stirring. It was a cold autumnal day. She was looking dreadfully bored, and very much as if she wished her visitor would go, or at least talk on some pleasanter subject than she had hitherto chosen.

“Poor Dacia! Have you thought, Cecily, that she has but a dreary future to look forward to?”

“Well, it does not seem very brilliant, especially if mamma continues as fidgety and cross as she has been since papa’s death.”

“And you might add, as she ever has been with Dacia.”

“But, Mum, Dacia has no right to complain of mamma’s not caring for her so much as she

might have done. You know *she* never cared for mamma as she did for papa."

"I don't think Dacia does complain. She never has to me. But that makes it none the less evident that she has much to bear."

"I had a letter from mamma to-day. She says they leave next week. I am very glad they have decided on going abroad. It certainly will be pleasanter for Dacia than poking in some wretched hole in England. I should hate to be poor in England."

"Indeed, Cecily, I think you would hate to be poor any where."

Mrs. Moncrieffe shrugged her shoulders in reply. She however thought, if you must be poor at all, it would be more tolerable on the Continent than in her own country. Perhaps she was right.

"I am going down to Christchurch to-morrow," continued Mrs. Ewart. "That, indeed, was the principal cause of my visit here to-day."

Cecily Moncrieffe turned an inquiring look on her aunt. She did not quite see why, because she was going down to Christchurch, she was to call

on her, more especially as she had done little else than lecture her since she entered the house. But Mrs. Ewart, being a peculiarly straightforward, plain-spoken person, made it apparent to her, without glossing over her words, why she had deemed it well to see her before going to her mother's.

"You of course intend asking your mother and sister to stay here when they are in town; and therefore it would be as well to write and tell them so at once, or for me to be the bearer of a message to that effect."

"I never thought of that. Of course they must sleep on their way. Dear me, what shall I do? There is but one spare room, and—" Mrs. Moncrieffe paused.

"And what, Cecily?" Cecily made no answer. "Pray say all you have to say at once, for I must be going. I have plenty to do before starting to-morrow."

"Well," replied Cecily, pleased enough to hear Mrs. Ewart *was* going soon, "the fact is, Countess Langen, who is now at Brighton whilst their house is being painted, wrote and asked me to give her

a bed for a night or two. She wants to come to town for a few days, on account of the king of S——'s death."

"What on earth can the king of S——, or the king of the Sandwich Islands, have to do with the Countess Langen? And pray who is this Countess Langen you have become so intimate with of late?"

"Why, really, Mum, you never know any thing."

"Perhaps not, my dear; and it might be as well if you knew as little. But go on."

"Well, she's the wife of the first secretary to the S—— Legation; so the king of S——'s death obliges her to go into mourning: and as she has a notion no one can do any thing in the way of dress fit to put on a lady but Madame Turner, she wants to come up in order to procure her mourning from her."

"What! Madame Turner of Royal-road?"

"Yes."

"I think it stamps every woman at once who deals at that house."

"Stamps her as what?"

"As being frivolous and extravagant."

"It only stamps her as being fashionable and rich," said Mrs. Moncrieffe indignantly. "If I could afford it, I would employ her too. I have had one dress from her—the most lovely thing I ever had on in my life! Even James declared I looked charming; and James, you know, has no taste."

"No, my dear; and that is probably why he thought you looked charming in one of Mrs. Turner's dresses; otherwise he would think you more charming in something more simple and less costly."

"You have such queer notions, Mum; you always had, you know. However, what am I to do? What day does mamma intend coming up, I wonder? Do you know at all? It will be very awkward if she decides just on the same day as the Countess Langen does."

"I don't think any day is fixed as yet. In Dacia's last letter to me, she said she thought her mother would never decide on a day herself; that some one would have to do it for her; and she wrote and asked me, chiefly, I believe, to try and persuade your mother to leave before the Ash-

ley Singletons arrive. Dacia dreads meeting them very much. I don't see why, though I understand perfectly her feelings in desiring to be away from the place before they come to take possession."

"They have behaved very well, I think," said Cecily Moncrieffe. "They have left mamma in quiet possession for six months, and they might have turned her out the instant papa died."

"They might, certainly; but they could hardly have done so in common decency. However, it is quite right that the place should be ready for them now. They gave her ample notice, and plenty of time for forming her plans."

"They also said they would be happy if she felt inclined to remain on a few weeks longer as their guest, did they not?"

"Yes; and your mother was furious with them for proposing such a thing," said Mrs. Ewart, smiling. "But, Cis, I came here for one specific purpose, and it seems to be the very last I am attending to. What do you intend doing? You cannot let your mother and sister go to an hotel; that is out of all possibility."

"If mamma would come this week, or quite

in the beginning of next, I could manage; but what can I do, Mum, if she and the Countess both say they are coming at the same time?"

"Write to the Countess and tell her you can't have her, that's all; it's very simple."

"O, I can't do that!"

"And why can't you?"

Mrs. Moncrieffe's pretty face coloured up. "Because—because she is a great friend of mine, and I told her she could always have the use of my spare room when she liked."

"There is more than that, Cecily—I am sure of it; so you need not deny it. I never saw the woman, and I know nothing about her; but I think she has done you no good. Ever since you have struck up an intimacy with her, you have got yourself surrounded by a crew of foreigners that come here and talk nonsense to you—"

"They don't talk nonsense."

"My dear, men—young men—who pay constant morning calls on pretty young women *always* talk nonsense. Besides, Cecily, you are just the sort of woman to encourage and like such folly. What was that man doing that I

found here when I came in, standing before you with both his feet together, as if he were exhibiting his new shiny boots to you, having dismissed his hat from inspection by holding it with both his hands behind him? He looked like a ticket-of-leave man just returned—”

“Good Heavens! Why, he is one of the *attachés* to the Neapolitan Embassy, and sings delightfully.”

“Ah, I daresay he does, and I should think he was capable of very little else. The man looked a conceited puppy: that cutting the hair so close, just like a convict’s, is nothing but affectation. That is the set this woman has brought you into; and a very bad set it is, I am sure.”

“Why, Mum, there is no society so sought after; no circles more select than diplomatic ones: it is the very best there is.”

“I have no opinion of it, if the men I have seen here form a specimen. I daresay their chiefs may be well enough; but I know very well what all the off-shoots are, if we judge of them—and no bad guide either—by our own young men that are sent off to the Continent as *attachés* at

the English embassies : they are the young men that nothing can be made of at home. But I am wandering widely from my business again, besides doing no good, I feel ; only wasting my words. Am I to tell your mother you expect her, or am I to say you cannot receive her ?”

“O, of course you must not say that ! I must manage something, I suppose. I must make Flore turn out of her room and sleep with one of the housemaids ; but she’ll make a horrible to-do about it, I am certain. Maids can’t bear being obliged to rough it.”

“Rough it ! How can you talk such nonsense, Cecily ? It really provokes me to listen to you. I believe, sooner than make Madame Flore give up her room for a few nights, you would let your mother and sister not only suffer the discomfort, but be at the expense of going to an hotel.”

Mrs. Ewart judged her niece rightly, I think. Cecily Moncrieffe was a selfish, silly woman, disliking any thing that caused her the least trouble, or in any way put her out ; and the idea of her mother and sister coming to her just at that time

disturbed her arrangements more than she dared to own. I say dared, for she had not quite thrown off a sort of fear she entertained for her aunt; a fear inculcated in her from her infancy, through her mother always making Mrs. Ewart a species of *bête noire* that she threatened both her children with when she found them wanting in obedience—a want peculiarly developed in her eldest daughter Cecily.

Mrs. Moncrieffe had one or two little plans in her head, the carrying out of which would be somewhat difficult if Mrs. and Miss Singleton were her guests at the same time with the Countess Langen; but there seemed no help for it if her mother really meant to leave England the following week. She could not let them go to an hotel. Her stupid husband even would wonder what possessed her if she permitted such a thing. As it was, he did not show any great partiality for her friend the Countess, and he might be glad of something to lay hold of that would lessen their intimacy. No, there was nothing for it but to run the risk of upsetting Mrs. Flore's equanimity, and request her to share one of the other servants' rooms for the time being.

"I would not do any thing of the kind," said Mrs. Moncrieffe, in reply to her aunt's accusation ; "but you must know it isn't pleasant to be turned out of one's room. Flore will tear my hair out of my head by the handful every morning in revenge, I am quite sure."

"Then it is a pity you do not get rid of her, if she is that sort of person. But the fact is, Cecily, you have fallen into that weak habit, that seems daily to be a growing fashion, of being afraid of your own servants. And that class are quick enough to find out where they may encroach and take advantage. I daresay, now, Flore thinks herself quite a fine lady."

"O, I am sure she does. You should see her dressed when she is going out to see her friends. Why, she is much grander than I ever am."

"Well, Cis, I suppose one might as well attempt to teach you Hebrew, and expect you to learn it, as try to put common sense into you, or your maid either. So good-bye. Remember what I have just been saying to you : if you act so as to give the world the power of talking, the world will not fail to take advantage of it. One's cha-

racter is about the only possession we have that the world seems anxious to look after for us. I know you would never do any thing actually wrong ; you would not be my brother's child if you did ; but you will none the less get the credit of it if you are not more careful. Don't let those goat-bearded men have it in their power to boast of their intimacy here. It will not sound well, my dear. Good-bye once more."

"Good-bye, Mum," said Cis, totally unheeding the lecture, as it was the wind-up of her aunt's visit. "Give my love to mamma and Dacia. You need not say any thing to them about the Countess Langen ; she may not come, after all, whilst they are here.—And she sha'n't," added Mrs. Moncrieffe to herself, when Mrs. Ewart was fairly out of hearing, "if I can manage to put her off. It will be horribly provoking if they are all here together ; what with mamma's fretting, and Dacia's silly primness and ignorance of the ways of the world, Maria will be awfully bored."

Mrs. Moncrieffe looked at the clock ; it was nearly four ; and she had ordered the carriage at that hour ; so she hastened upstairs to dress. She

had some shopping to do, and one or two visits to pay. Though London was empty as far as its own particular world went, there were many in it from the country, and amongst them some of Cecily's friends that could date their knowledge of her from her earliest childhood.

As Mrs. Moncrieffe drove away from her house, she saw her husband within a little distance. "I hope to goodness he has not met Mum, for I don't want her to be talking to him about my receiving too many foreigners : he hates them all so—he is such a fool!" was the instant thought that crossed her mind ; not that she was one atom afraid of her husband, but she did not want to be worried by his talking to her, that was all. If she had considered for a moment, however, she would never have thought that Mrs. Ewart would choose the street for the discussion of such a topic. No ; Mum—as she was called by her nieces—was much too business-like to do any thing in a hurry or on impulse. If the thought had occurred to her that it would be advisable to tell James Moncrieffe he did not take proper care of his wife, she would weigh the subject well before acting on the

idea; but she had no intention of doing any thing of the kind. She was essentially a clear-sighted woman, and therefore not likely to be guilty of such a piece of folly as telling a husband—a silly weak young man into the bargain—that his wife wanted looking after. She might talk to Cecily herself; but she would do no more.

Mrs. Ewart was the only sister of the late John Singleton of Christchurch-park in Cheshire, whose death some few months back had rendered her an object of greater interest to his widow than she had ever been before. For Mrs. Ewart had money to leave, and she had no nearer relations than Cecily Moncrieffe and Dacia Singleton; and none dearer than the latter. So Mrs. Singleton hoped her children—if not herself—might benefit by it.

Mrs. Singleton, a woman of weak temperament, not over-strong constitution, and terribly dependent on this world's goods for comfort, was left with a bare four hundred a year at her husband's death; and this to her, with her extravagant habits and tastes, was actual penury—that is, the thought of it only; for as yet the actual trial of living on it had not been put in practice. She had

11

never had but two children. The eldest, Cecily, had married, some five years back, the Honourable James Moncrieffe, son of Lord Stretton; and though a younger son, he was richer than that unlucky and much-despised race generally are, for he inherited his mother's fortune, and she was an heiress, though only a Miss Thompson. Her youngest, Dacia, was still unmarried, and with her. But Dacia was not her mother's favourite; and yet now, in her hour of trouble, she was the most loving and gentle of the two daughters.

Mrs. Singleton remembered when Dacia was a child,—quite a little child, between six and seven years of age,—overhearing a conversation between her and her father. John Singleton was sitting in the dusk, with his little daughter on his knee, and had asked her that foolish question some foolish parents do sometimes ask their children when they are jealous of their young love :

“Who does Dacia love best in the world?”

“You, darling papa!” replied the child, throwing her little fat dimpled arms round her father's neck, and kissing him. “You, you, you; but

that's a secret, papa, because, you see, it might make mamma unhappy if she knew it."

And so from that moment Mrs. Singleton loved her eldest daughter better than poor Dacia, and John Singleton clung more fondly to his youngest child. And this love grew and increased, till Dacia became his chief, almost only, object of interest in life. Not but what he was an affectionate husband, and also fond enough of Cecily. He had married for love; but he was sadly worn and torn by his wife's incessant complaining. She was delicate, no doubt, but nothing more; yet she made herself out a terrible martyr, and was never well. She might be seen at any moment with smelling-salts in one hand and the other gathering a Brussels-lace shawl around her, and holding it clasped over her chest. A shawl, even a lace one, in the day-time, when worn as in-door apparel, always gives one a notion of the wearer having been ill, if not actually so at the time.

Another tie that united in closer bonds of affection the mother with her eldest child was their similarity, not alone of face, but disposition. Both were weak. Mrs. Singleton's weakness

showed itself in giving herself up to every description of fancy about her health ; her daughter's in thinking herself irresistible to all the world. Both had their failings increased by their being—unconsciously, perhaps, but none the less surely—fostered by those around them. John Singleton, up to the hour of his death (and Dacia still), gave in to Mrs. Singleton's whims and fancies in every possible manner ; pitying and soothing by turns, till of course she thought herself the most unhappy, hardly-dealt-by woman in creation to be doomed to such terrible health. Cecily Moncrieffe had the male portion of the London world at her feet, assuring her that her attractions and charms were greater far than any other woman's ; that they could not exist without occasionally basking in the sunshine of her presence, &c. &c. ; and she believed them. Nothing further need be said to prove how weak she was.

Mrs. Ewart was perhaps the only being who ever told either the one or the other the truth, and they disliked her accordingly. Dislike is perhaps hardly the right term to use ; they did not dislike her, but they disliked her presence, unless, indeed,

they stood in need of sound advice or sensible opinions; then they were both of them wise enough to know that there was no one could serve their purpose better, or so well as downright, plain-spoken Mrs. Ewart. Dacia Singleton was fond of her aunt; she loved her because she knew her father had done so; and what her father did, she always endeavoured to do.

It was Dacia who had given Mrs. Ewart the *sobriquet* of Mum. It was "Aunt Mum" first; but at last the aunt was dropped, and she became simply "Mum;" even her brother and sister-in-law frequently adopted the child's nickname. It was easier than Ursula, the name Mrs. Ewart rejoiced in. It was no wonder, therefore, Mum was attached to Dacia, and gave many a thought to her altered position.

John Singleton had lived up to the very extent of his fortune: his own tastes were expensive, and his wife, without being actually extravagant, frittered away money as recklessly as if she had an unlimited fortune at her back; the consequence was, that at his death there was positively nothing but what the estate was charged with, that is, four

hundred a year for his wife, and one hundred a year for each younger child ; so Cecily—who, however, did not require it—and Dacia had that, but nothing more.

It was one of Mrs. Singleton's great grievances now that she had no son. She looked on it as a personal injury ; she considered it a hardship she need never have been subjected to. During her husband's life she never gave the matter a thought, nor did she waste one wish concerning it ; but when he died, and she came to the full understanding of her altered position, and then recollected that owning a son would have saved her all money-matter troubles—at least she thought it would—she was excessively indignant at not having had one. Poor Mrs. Singleton ! she was not fitted to buffet and fight with adversity. It did seem hard that after six-and-twenty years of ease and affluence she should have to tread the rough uneven road of poverty ; but so it was.

It is easier to give up good habits than bad ones ; it is easier to fall into expensive ways than to learn thrift. We can so much better bear the reverse of fortune when it happens to revoke

poverty instead of wealth. Yet it is not always the principal adjuncts of wealth that are the objects we most miss: a smaller house, fewer horses, a less number of servants,—all these may be endured; but it is the refinement over every thing that gets brushed off; it is that common coarse hue which takes its place, a woman feels so hard to put up with: men are less sensitive on that score.

CHAPTER II.

PACKING UP.

THERE were usually two sides to most questions that Mrs. Singleton, as a rule, considered had but one; but I hardly think any one would quarrel with her for maintaining her present case to be completely one-sided. It was a sorry position to be left in, after what had been; there lay the strength of her misfortunes, that till now she had been one of God's favoured creatures. True, she never admitted it, never seemed even to be aware of it, till all was taken from her that had hitherto rendered her life as a smooth stream flowing on in uninterrupted ease; but now, when the rocks and stones intercepted her course, she looked back with true appreciation of her lost blessings.

It was a glorious afternoon; the mellow, softened shades of autumn were spreading over the rich wooded country surrounding Christchurch-

park. The hill-side and valley alike wore that golden hue approaching evening brings; the setting sun was reflected by a deep-red light on the trellised windows of the old house, every pane in which seemed to be illumined by its own separate light. All was bright and beautiful without, but within there was another colouring over every thing. Disorder and confusion reigned supreme, and no one seemed to dispute its authority.

In a room facing the south, and looking down on a flower-garden that would have tempted any one—even not an enthusiastic admirer of Flora—to wander amidst its sweet-scented, brilliant-coloured beds, sat, or rather lay, Mrs. Singleton; for she rarely sat except to her meals. She was a tall, fair, aristocratic-looking woman, with a drooping look about her, as if she were not strong enough to bear her own weight. As a girl she was graceful and elegant, with sufficient beauty to attract universal admiration. Her features were more delicate than small, and her blue soft eyes had a wearied expression; she opened them as if it were a labour to do so, and then instantly let the lids droop again, as if the fatigue of keeping

them open was too great. As a high-coloured flower pales from being kept in a room, so had Mrs. Singleton's complexion become peculiarly white and delicate; she had not been outside the gates of the old park since her husband's corpse had been carried through them to his resting-place in the little quiet churchyard just beyond.

She was dressed now in the deep mourning of a widow, with her fair hair drawn back from her face—giving her a somewhat wan look—and, hidden beneath that terribly-disfiguring head-dress, a widow's cap. She wore a black crape shawl, thrown over her shoulders, and her never-absent appendage, a smelling-bottle, in her hand.

The room was, or rather used to be, Mrs. Singleton's boudoir; for there was little now to denote it as any room in particular. The tables were stripped of all ornaments, and, in their place, torn newspapers, pieces of twine, long strips of straw, and dust in abundance, were seen. The mantelpiece was totally bare, with the exception of a gum-bottle, which had been placed there for safety, and two or three paper-matches. There is nothing renders a room more unfurnished or

desolate-looking than a mantelpiece devoid of its usual appurtenances. On a marble console which faced the fireplace, and stood beneath a strip of looking-glass, of the same width as the table, and reaching up to the ceiling, was a small stone bottle with ink, and a pen steeping in it; beside it lay a quantity of adhesive labels, ready for directing. One or two cases stood on the velvet-pile carpet, well packed, containing the various nicknacks of which the room was so totally destitute. Each article was enveloped in straw: hence the stray shreds that were seen lying about tables and chairs and on the thick soft carpet.

Bending over one of these was a tall, fair, lithesome girl, whose age might be between nineteen and twenty. I do not think it would be possible to see any thing under heaven more gloriously beautiful than Dacia Singleton. And yet, in what consisted her perfect beauty it would be difficult to say; for artists might cavil over the symmetry of her features, amateurs might disagree as to the proportions of the short upper lip and the square low forehead; yet withal she was one that the eye rarely has a chance of resting on

her equal. I will try to depict her to you as she was then, but I know it can be but a sorry copy of the original that I can give you. Rather above the average height, with a slight figure, but giving no signs of the fragility you saw in her mother's, yet soft and flexible. Her complexion fair and dazzling from its transparent purity, and showing the blood beneath if aught occasioned its agitation. Her eyes large and full, of a dark yet brilliant blue; her eyebrows perfectly straight, a narrow, thin, dark line, contrasting strangely with her bright golden hair; her eyelashes long and curled, casting a shadow on the cheek beneath; her nose straight and small, with thin clear nostrils, showing the red tinge that coloured them, if she sat so that a cross-light was cast over her; her chiselled lips, her mouth generally slightly open, displaying partly her small white and perfectly even teeth—whiter from the contrast with her bright crimson lips; a mass of fair waving hair, drawn off her face and twisted altogether in one plain simple twist at the back of her well-shaped head. Such was Dacia Singleton. She was dressed in a black dress, which perhaps was

as becoming as any thing to her fair young face, though it would be a strange dress that she could look otherwise than beautiful in.

She was busy trying to pack a delicate Venetian glass in a manner sufficiently secure to save her any anxiety as to its ultimate safety. She had already encased it in wadding.

“Dacia, how can you go on doing that dreadful work! It surely is not your place to be packing up the china and glass,” said Mrs. Singleton, both languidly and captiously, inhaling the salts from her bottle as she spoke.

“It is only your glass, mamma, I am putting in; you asked me to see to it, you know,” replied Dacia, continuing her endeavours to fix in the fragile object securely.

“You make such a fuss always about any thing you are asked to do,” said her mother, “that I always regret afterwards having made a request. I suppose you wish your aunt to arrive whilst you are still there fiddling with the straw, so that you may tell her *I* asked you to do it.”

“Mamma!” exclaimed Dacia, turning round towards her mother with a proud, disdainful look;

not at her mother was it intended, but at the idea of her being thought capable of a mean action. "You know it is at all times a pleasure for me to do any thing for you; and that I would sooner cut my tongue out than either complain or appear to do so." The rich colour rose to her cheeks as she spoke. "I merely reminded you it was yourself asked me to pack the little glass in, because you said it was not my place to—"

"There, there—do stop, Dacia. My head aches already, and your arguing will not improve it."

Mrs. Singleton laid her head back softly against the sofa-cushion, and closed her eyes, giving any one the impression she really could not bear any more conversation. Dacia went on with what she was about, unheeding her mother's remarks; indeed, she was pretty well accustomed to them. She rarely did any thing without her mother seeing something amiss in it, even if it were, as in the present case, her own suggestions or wishes being carried out.

The glass was packed in now, and Dacia went

towards the window that had a side view of the old oak trees forming an avenue, which lined the road leading from the lodge to the house. All was still; no appearance yet of a carriage, no rumbling of wheels in the distance. Dacia looked at her watch: it wanted a quarter to five—that is, according to her time—but she was anxious to know correctly; and though nothing would ever induce her to admit that the ridiculous little piece of mechanism she wore at her side ever erred, she had an inward conviction there might be ten minutes' laziness in its movements.

“Mamma, what time is it by your watch?”

“Haven't you got on your own?”

“Yes; but I wanted to know if I am right. I forgot to wind it up the other day, and I set it by guess, so I am not sure that it is correct.”

“As you are not starting on a journey by railway, I daresay it is correct enough.”

Dacia was silent; she would not ask her mother again; but presently she left the room, and walking along the east side of the house, came to a window that looked into the stable-yard, where, above the coach-house, was a huge-faced clock.

This Dacia knew old Fenwick kept to railway time. One of poor John Singleton's good points had been great punctuality; and Fenwick, like all over whom he had any authority, was well trained.

"She might be here," thought Miss Singleton, as she slowly retraced her steps. Before she reached her mother's room the welcome sound of the carriage-wheels grating over the gravelled road met her ear. She bounded down the stairs, and stood at the hall-door in time to meet Mrs. Ewart with a warm embrace.

"Well, dear child, how are you?" said her aunt, looking up at the bright beautiful face, which appeared more lovely than ever from the flush of pleasure that overspread her features.

"So delighted you are come, Mum!" said her niece.

"Well, I suppose I must take that for an answer to my question; and how is your mother?"

"The same as usual; she is complaining of headache this afternoon."

"Always something," muttered Mrs. Ewart to herself; and then turning to Dacia she said, glancing around the old hall, and then across it into the

drawing-room, the door of which stood open, "It looks desolate child, doesn't it?"

"O, it is dreadful! I cannot bear to go in to any of the rooms. I wish we were away now; the pain of leaving can hardly exceed the pain of staying, as things are."

"I too shall be glad when you are gone, as go you must. Tell me, Dacia, how do you like the idea of living abroad?" asked Mrs. Ewart, as they now sat together in the room allotted to her during her temporary stay.

"Well enough, Mum. I don't much care where we go, as we have to leave this dear, dear old place."

"There is no use, my dear, in fretting over circumstances which admit of no change; rather try and forget the past than dwell on it, if it is to cause you unhappiness."

"It is so hateful to think of other people coming here. I don't think I should care so much about going if no one else could live here."

"That is pure selfishness, Dacia, and not like you."

"O yes, Mum, it is; I am horribly selfish. But

never mind, I would rather you did not believe me," she added, smiling.

"And how does your mother like the prospect of leaving England?"

"Sometimes she complains terribly of the hardship of being driven away from her own country; but if ever I say any thing against it, she instantly appears to think that no place in England would suit her, and that I am a most disagreeable being for raising shadows over the future. Still, as I told you, she won't fix the day, and yet she knows we must leave next week."

"To judge from the bare-looking rooms, and the quantity of cases, you seem to have every thing packed."

"Yes; as far as that goes, we are ready."

"I saw Cecily yesterday; but I will tell you all about her presently. I had better go and see your mother at once, or she will be affronted, and accuse me of neglecting her."

Mrs. Singleton was in the same position you saw her in just now when her sister-in-law and daughter came in; she opened her eyes slowly, as if

the eyelids were loaded, and required great exertion to raise them.

“How do you do, Barbara? I half expected to find you out this lovely afternoon; surely it would do you good to take a drive! I wish you had driven to the station to meet me.”

“You, who are always in robust health,” replied Mrs. Singleton, after giving Mrs. Ewart a languid welcome, “cannot understand what it is to suffer as I do. I am not equal to any great exercise, as you know.” The salts were here put into requisition. If Mrs. Singleton was ever vexed or put out of humour—not by any means a rare occurrence, especially with Mrs. Ewart—she invariably had recourse to her smelling-bottle.

“I don’t call driving much of an exercise, however. I have come down for a day or two to see if I can be of any service to you; but it appears to me as if you were quite prepared for your journey. What day do you propose going?”

“You had better ask Dacia; she does every thing and orders every body, me as well as others.”

Dacia had left the room; she had gone to have some tea prepared without any further delay. Five

o'clock was the hour Mrs. Singleton always took it, and it was now nearly half-past. Dacia had almost forgotten it, in the midst of her pleasure at Mrs. Ewart's arrival, and she feared her mother attacking her for her neglect. As there was no housekeeper now to see to such matters, she was supposed to do so. All the servants, with the exception of the very few it was absolutely necessary to retain till they left themselves, had been dismissed.

"My dear Barbara, pray talk reasonably. Dacia would no more dream of naming a day for your leaving here than I should. *You* must fix the time; and it seems to me you will have to do so quickly, as next week brings you up to the period of the Ashley Singletons' arrival, and you have declined being here as their guests."

"Of course I have. I cannot think how they could offer me such an insult as to propose such a thing." And Mrs. Singleton's pale cheek coloured with anger.

"Then would it not be better for you to leave next Wednesday?"

"Why Wednesday? What are you so anxious

to hurry me away for? You are as bad as Dacia."

"Why, you *must* go, and you must fix a time."

"Well, there is no such hurry. It will do to fix the day next week."

Mrs. Singleton closed her eyes and conversation together. Nothing more was said till Dacia appeared, followed by a woman-servant carrying in a tray, with three cups of tea and as many slices of thin bread-and-butter.

"This is having my tea at five o'clock!" said Mrs. Singleton, raising herself up and slipping her feet down to the ground. "But it's like every thing else: nothing is thought of for me; nothing done to give me any comfort, even in trifles."

"Mamma, I am very sorry," said Dacia, handing her mother the plate of bread-and-butter. "The truth is, I almost forgot it; but it's only half an hour late."

"Only half an hour! Wait till you feel as I do, Dacia, and then you will know what it is to be kept waiting half an hour even for a cup of tea."

The tea was drank, and found fault with by Mrs. Singleton, praised by Mrs. Ewart, and then sent away.

"Now tell me all about Cecily," said Dacia, taking a stool and sitting down, with her elbow resting on the edge of the sofa, and facing where Mrs. Ewart sat.

"What about Cecily?" asked Mrs. Singleton fretfully.

"Mum saw her yesterday," replied Dacia.

"You will probably have a letter from her tomorrow," said Mrs. Ewart. "She sent her love to you, and wished to know what day she might expect you, as she takes it for granted you will sleep in town on your road."

"Of course I must sleep in town. Do you take me for a horse, that I could make such a journey as I have before me without resting on the road? Besides, I have several things to do in London."

"I shall be glad to spend a few days with Cecily," said Dacia: "we see so little of each other now, and are likely to see less for the future."

"A few days! Really, Dacia, you think of no

one but yourself. How can I remain a few days at this season in London, when the fogs are so thick that the very thought of them produced a difficulty in my breathing! One day will be quite sufficient for all I have to do."

"I thought there were no fogs now," said her daughter; "that they only began in November."

"Then you thought wrong," said Mrs. Singleton, closing her eyes and inhaling her salts.

"Well, right or wrong, it does not much signify," put in Mrs. Ewart. "The first point to settle is the time you intend to arrive there, not when you leave it, as that is a matter quite open to a change, if you should so fancy. But from here you must go, and that next week; so it seems to me, as I before said, Wednesday will be the best day; and if you decide on it, I will return to town to-morrow; for as I find I can be of no use here, I may be elsewhere."

"I think Wednesday would be the best day," said Dacia, "for then mamma would have Thursday in town; and on Friday we might cross to Dunkerque."

“Cross to Dunkerque! What do you mean, Dacia?”

Mrs. Singleton had listened to the proposed arrangement any thing but contentedly; and yet she knew that, if left to her, she should never decide the matter at all.

“She means what she says, I suppose,” replied Mrs. Ewart for Dacia, beginning to lose patience with Mrs. Singleton’s fretful contrariness.

Mrs. Singleton generally knocked under a little when any one spoke in a decided tone to her. So she replied,

“You may settle to leave here on Wednesday, and London on Friday; but nothing shall induce me to go direct from London to Dunkerque. I would not undertake such a voyage for any inducement; so do not propose it.”

One point—and that the main one—being carried, Mrs. Ewart was willing enough to let Mrs. Singleton take any route she chose for reaching her destination.

“But why you should leave to-morrow,” continued Mrs. Singleton, “I am sure I cannot tell. It was not worth while your coming only to stay a

few hours. But no one cares how inconvenienced I am, or how much is left on my shoulders to see to."

"Mamma, I will do every thing. You need not move from your sofa, unless you like."

"And I will gladly remain, if I can be of any comfort or use," said Mrs. Ewart.

"Unless you stay and go up to town with us, I don't see any good you can do. There would be some use in that."

"O, do, Mum!" said Dacia.

"Of course I will, my dear, if you wish it."

"Yes, that's just like every one: if Dacia wishes it! My wishes have no influence."

"Don't talk nonsense, Barbara. It is for you, and on your account solely, I shall stay. Dacia does not want me."

"Yes, I do, Mum dear."

"Hold your tongue, child, do."

After dinner, when Mrs. Singleton, who had done full justice to some partridges—a present from a neighbouring squire—but yet maintained she had no appetite and could eat nothing, had retired to her sofa for her usual nap, Mrs. Ewart

and Dacia talked over, as far as they could see their way, the plans for the future.

“ You must write at once to Cecily, my dear, and tell her to expect you on Wednesday. Your mother may be disposed to change her mind again, if we do not put it out of her power.”

“ I wish mamma would stay over till the Monday; one day with Cis is so little. Besides, we shall be out the whole of it, shopping.”

“ Perhaps, when once in Cecily’s comfortable house, your mother may be only too willing to stay. I think, however, you had better say nothing more on the subject. What shopping have you to do?”

“ Commissions for Mrs. Percival. She wrote and asked mamma—of course saying if it was not too much trouble, and so on—to get her some flannel, cotton, needles, pins—O, no end of things; and amongst them a cheese and a black alpaca dress. She says they are so prized in France—isn’t it strange?—and here they are thought so common.”

“ Not a bit strange. They are scarce in France, and, like every thing else, valued accord-

ingly. Does Mrs. Percival say all is ready for you?"

"Well, so far, that she has seen several apartments that she says will suit ; but she recommends our going first to the hotel, and then choosing what we like best ourselves ; and I am sure she is right, for mamma would never be satisfied with any thing any one else chose for her. She says she has a capital servant ready."

"That is a great thing. I wish your mother would leave Maxwell behind her ; she will find her more trouble than comfort. She will never put up with French ways and French people, especially in a provincial town. Paris would suit her, I daresay, but Dunkerque never ; I am satisfied of that."

"Do you think it will be so very disagreeable, Mum?" asked Dacia, looking a little anxious.

"To a selfish uneducated woman, who prides herself on her fine dress, and likes to boast of the rich people in whose family she resides—yes ; to a young girl with resources within herself, and the great object in view of doing right, and fulfilling an anxious and perhaps trying duty towards a

mother ill-fitted to act for herself, it will not be disagreeable. It will be pleasanter far than either living in a small house in London or a cottage in the country, after all you have hitherto been accustomed to."

Dacia sighed. She did not think it sounded very pleasant.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

THE Moncrieffes lived in Hertford-street; a pleasant house enough, though somewhat noisily situated, and certainly not intended for accommodating three ladies and two lady's-maids over and above the ordinary family, to say nothing of the huge amount of luggage amongst them that had to be taken in also. Still they were all there, and they all declared themselves perfectly comfortable. Perhaps they were so; at all events they could hardly do less than assert it. Some one must have been thoroughly uncomfortable, that is perfectly certain, and I think Flore was the victim on the occasion.

The Countess Langen had arrived the day before the Singletons were expected, and Mrs. Moncrieffe apologised to her friend for the somewhat meagre accommodation her maid would have

to put up with. The *grande dame* herself had the spare room allotted her, Cecily thinking it better to put her mother and sister in Flore's room than her other guest. One may take liberties with one's mother and sister one cannot do with a fashionable friend, especially if she is a countess, even though she be but a foreign countess.

But it was not the want of room that in any way caused vexation to Cecily Moncrieffe; it was the presence of her mother and sister just at that moment. She would have made them welcome to her house for a month of Sundays at any other period; but at this particular time of all others she preferred their absence. However, she hoped they would go on the Friday, as Dacia in her letter had informed her they would. Mrs. Moncrieffe's vanity was in one sense innocent enough; but it gave rise to silly jealousies within her, and she disliked any one who might chance to cross her in the path she trod for admiration only. She well knew her sister's superior beauty; and when Madame Langen was her guest she knew there would be quite enough to do to hold her own, without Dacia's attractions to contend against as

well. She had something to gain too—at least she thought so—by waving prudence in the Countess's presence, but none with her sister. Therefore for the moment she became a horrible nuisance to her. She was fond enough of her if they were alone at dull old Christchurch, but in London she by no means suited her; and it was not entirely on account of her male friends, but she even feared her influence over the Countess Langen. It was downright jealousy; so the whole matter was a source of great annoyance to her.

She could not act either so freely in Dacia's presence. She would have to put a bridle on her tongue, and be cautious how she talked of certain people and their actions. She could not tell the Countess of this man's admiration and that one's infatuation, and boast of her hundred-and-one conquests; and of such conversation Cecily Moncrieffe never wearied; but she knew right well Dacia would disapprove of it, and probably tell her so. Then, again, her mother worried her with her constant complaining of herself and her ailments, and the neglect she met with from all.

The day they arrived Mrs. Moncrieffe had invited half-a-dozen men to dinner; one or two of them being Mrs. Ewart's escaped convicts, otherwise *attachés* to different embassies, that were in town doing duty whilst their chiefs were taking their holidays at some of the German watering-places, or wandering over the moors in search of grouse, that most of them, if they spoke the truth, would rather eat, leaving to others the trouble of shooting.

"Such a pack of women," said Cecily,—“we could not possibly sit down to dinner without a few black coats by our sides to enliven us a little. It is so horribly dull without men.”

Dacia looked up. “Surely James would have been enough to enliven us, if we required it; but I don't think we should have been dull, do you?” she asked, turning to Countess Langen.

“No, indeed; and I hardly think I should ever be dull with your gay lively sister to talk to.”

“O, that's all nonsense,” replied Cecily smiling and pleased; “you know you hate women's society.”

"I!" exclaimed the Countess, in a well-counterfeited tone of dismay, if it were counterfeit.

"Yes; you, to be sure."

But there was no time to argue the point further, for in walked at this moment two young men, who had been duly announced by names which, if they really possessed them, must have been the most original that were ever heard. They were soon followed by two more; then came one, and lastly another, who, with the two others, require a few words related concerning them.

Let all honour be paid to our neighbours: so we will give precedence to Monsieur de Monléon, unpaid *attaché* to the French embassy. Small in stature, but possessing a peculiarly handsome face with fine delicately cut features, a dark pale complexion and jet-black hair—not cropped *à la convict*—and moustache, Jules de Monléon not only thought no woman could look upon him without being captivated, but too frequently found such to be the case. The result was, the man became conceited, and failed to hide it. He was, by the way, at this period devoted to Mrs. Moncrieffe;

and Mrs. Moncrieffe, in return, felt a glow of intense satisfaction when she thought she had secured to herself the admiration of the fascinating diplomatist.

Robert Reeves—a tall, broad-shouldered, good-looking man, verging on fifty; strong, upright, and good-tempered; neither fair nor dark, but that medium complexion which is so thoroughly English—was by profession a doctor. One of those, however, who possess none but healthy patients, and those all women. A man would as soon have thought of sending for Robert Reeves if he were ill as he would have of applying a dozen fleas instead of a dozen leeches in case of inflammation. Amongst his patients Mr. Reeves reckoned Mrs. Moncrieffe, and she had the utmost faith in him; if her shoe pinched her, he was consulted in order to suggest a remedy for the evil. I don't think *Cis* ever had any more serious cause to lay before him for opinion; yet she was always sending for him, always wanting something that no one but Mr. Reeves could possibly do for her. So Robert Reeves was known by the household to be a favoured guest in Hertford-street.

Henry Marsden, the last of the guests we need to give a sketch of, was opposite in all respects to the doctor or the diplomatist. He was tall, very slight, very fair, and looked, in truth, what he was, the inheritor of what many of England's sons are heir to—consumption. He was hardly more than five-and-twenty; but the slight stoop, occasioned originally from weakness, and now become habitual, added apparently to his age. He had a fine face, a broad open brow, with his fair curly hair well brushed off from it. His sleepy blue eyes had a tender loving look in them that told of a kind and gentle disposition. His mouth, somewhat large, was hidden by his moustache, and the thin, hollow cheeks were covered by ample whiskers. He might have passed for Mrs. Singleton's son, there was so much between them that was similar. It may have been that which caused Dacia to look up at him once or twice, as he stood between the table and fireplace talking to her sister. At all events her eyes wandered towards him more than once; and he, noticing the beautiful face that seemingly was attracted for some reason to him, asked Mrs. Moncrieffe who she was, and

then, on hearing, requested immediately to be presented to her.

Dacia Singleton noticed that as he passed by the Countess of Langen, and turned to her to make some commonplace apology for doing so, he gave a sudden and amazed start, which, however, was but momentary, and he the next instant was by Dacia's side, making *banale* remarks about the pleasure he felt in becoming acquainted with Mrs. Moncrieffe's sister. There was something, however, very absent in his manner, and Dacia found his eyes constantly turned to where the Countess of Langen was sitting. She wondered what it could be that so attracted him; certainly it was not admiration she saw written on his face, it was more astonishment a great deal.

"You have known my sister long?" asked Miss Singleton, by way of something to say. It is difficult to keep a conversation from flagging with a person of whose tastes, pursuits, and individual history we are totally ignorant.

"I have known Moncrieffe since we were boys, but your sister I met for the first time last year at Wildbad. You know, however, English people

become better acquainted in three weeks at one of those small continental watering-places than they do in three years if they only meet in London society. So I suppose I may say, if I have not known your sister long, I know her well."

Dacia looked up at the pleasant, kindly face that was bent down towards her; looked up to see whether he meant more than he actually said: she fancied the tone implied it. If he *did* know her sister well, she feared he must think her both vain and frivolous; and Wildbad, or any other Bad, was, she thought, from all she had heard, the very worst place for Cecily to be seen in. But at that moment Henry Marsden thought nothing but of the exquisite beauty of that upturned face, thinking and unconsciously wondering whether she too, like the rest of her sex, was as frail as she was fair. But if he knew Cecily Moncrieffe, he certainly did not know Dacia Singleton, or such a question could never have presented itself concerning one who was as pure in thought and deed as the fresh-fallen snow.

When dinner was announced Henry Marsden, without any previous instructions to that effect,

offered his arm to Miss Singleton, and together they went downstairs. Mr. Reeves was apportioned to Mrs. Singleton. I don't know whether he felt pleased, but I know she did ; for she was able to pour out her bodily troubles to one who, if he did not offer an attentive, at all events had an experienced, ear. James Moncrieffe took the Countess of Langen, who by a simple manœuvre succeeded in placing herself on the same side as Henry Marsden, though she was not next to him ; she appeared as little to care for looking at him as he, on the other hand, sought to look at her. Mrs. Moncrieffe took Jules de Monléon's arm, leaving the rest standing, as they passed, with their hands behind them holding their hats, as if they were indispensable articles for sitting down to dinner with and on. Why men persist in encumbering themselves with hats at such times is hard to understand, for they don't seem to have any necessity for them, either at or after dinner, inasmuch as they pass them from their own hands into those of a servant, apparently waiting for the sole purpose of taking them just as they are entering the dining-room.

Dacia Singleton thought, during a moment's lull in her conversation with Henry Marsden, that society was, after all, pleasant enough. Latterly she had, owing to her father's long illness and her mother's everlasting supposed illness, but rarely gone out; the consequence was she fancied she disliked company: it so happening, however, that she liked her companion, made her think she liked society in the mass. It is often the case that our opinion of a whole is formed from isolated occurrences.

"That lady's name, you say, is Langen—Countess Langen; is she an old acquaintance of yours?" asked Henry Marsden towards the end of dinner; and, something like a woman's postscript, it was chiefly the desire to ask her this question that made him, unsolicited, take her down to dinner.

"O, dear, no! You must know her better than I do, I think," said Dacia, with a lurking curiosity on her own side; "for I never saw her before to-day, and you seemed as if you had."

Marsden was silent for a moment, and then, when he was about to make some reply, Mrs. Mon-

crieffe made a move, and the ladies left the room. Later in the evening, however, an opportunity occurred for him to renew the conversation; that is, he made one, as all men can do when it suits them, as they can equally avoid a *tête-à-tête*, if they are so determined.

“Has your sister known Countess Langen long? Did she know her before her marriage?”

“Before my sister’s marriage? O no. I do not know whether they have been acquainted any length of time; but I hardly think they have, though they seem to be so intimate now.”

“More’s the pity. Your sister had better be intimate with the incar—Forgive me,” he added, in an altered tone, “I have no right to select your sister’s friends.”

“No, I do not think you have,” replied Dacia quietly; “but why do you speak so harshly of one that seems a very fascinating, and certainly a very handsome, woman?”

Marsden looked at Dacia Singleton for a moment, and then merely replied, “I spoke hastily, but not harshly.—*She* is not one to whom I could tell such a tale of misery and disgrace,”

was his inward comment, as he gazed at the young innocent-looking girl by his side.

“I think you did ; both your words and tone gave me the impression not only that you disliked her, but that my sister was wrong in knowing her so intimately.”

“I would not allow a sister of mine to sit down in the same room with her,” he replied, again urged on by some feeling to speak warmly and bitterly ; “but do not ask me any questions concerning her, Miss Singleton, for I could not answer them. I will only tell you one thing ; she did a bitter injury to one whom I loved very dearly, and that as the Countess Langen I never saw her till this evening. I will now wish you good-night, not good-bye, for I hope I may be fortunate enough to meet you again.”

“I hardly think that likely,” replied Dacia, smiling, “as we leave England the day after to-morrow for—for ever, I suppose.”

“That is indeed for a long time ; may I ask whither you are bound ?”

“Dunkerque. Not far off, you will say ; but I have never been out of my own country, and the

feeling I have is, that once cross the water, it might be to Australia as well as merely to a small town the other side of the Channel."

"You do not like the idea of living on the Continent?"

"Not much. One can hardly like leaving old friends and old associations for perhaps disagreeable acquaintances, and an entirely different mode of life."

"No, looking at it in that light, it is not pleasant; yet some of my friends that I value more than I can tell you, I met during my residence abroad."

"You, then, have lived on the Continent?"

"During the last four or five winters. My health has unfortunately compelled me to give up home-comforts and English cold for the miseries of an hotel-life, but the geniality and warmth of the southern sun."

Henry Marsden spoke in a sadder tone than was pleasant to hear. It was but natural that he should do so when the cause is considered; yet it is painful to hear people talk in a melancholy strain, especially if it is where health is concerned,

for there is no subject so difficult to offer consolation on. It is impossible to tell any one who complains of constant pain that it won't last, when they know it has already lasted for years, and likely to endure to their life's end. Nor can one tell a man that is gradually wasting away from the effects of a constitution utterly wrecked by that terribly destroying disease, consumption, that in a few weeks he will gain flesh, and once more be the strong healthful being he was. Dacia could only make some commonplace wish as to his future improvement; and then he told her he should call on the following day and bid her farewell.

Dacia Singleton followed Henry Marsden's movements as he went from one to the other with a strange interest—one she could in no way account for; she watched especially the way he evaded having even to bow a good-night to Madame Langen. She certainly had not fallen in love at first sight,—the idea suggesting it made her smile; and yet till he was gone her great blue eyes were never taken off him. Perhaps he had noticed this, though he had not appeared to do so;

for his head was so full of the bright beautiful girl he had just parted from, that he forgot to tell his coachman to drive him straight home instead of his club, which was his usual resort for half-an-hour at least every night, whether he dined out or not. But so disinclined was he to have the current of his reflections changed, that even though he was at the very door he called out in a muffled tone—for he had to guard against night-air—"Home."

Still far into the early hours of morning did Henry Marsden sit pondering over the events of the evening; events seemingly trifling and frivolous; yet they were significant enough, and fraught for the future with strange and wondrous changes. To himself individually they sufficed to give a colouring to the present of a brighter hue than he had ever thought to see it wear.

CHAPTER IV.

A FOOL'S PARADISE.

"YOU must have made a conquest of Mr. Marsden, Miss Singleton," said the Countess Langen, coming up and sitting down by her side.

Dacia somewhat coldly replied that she had seen no signs to draw such an inference from. The girl seemed suddenly impregnated with Marsden's dislike to the Countess. She fancied the expression in her eyes spoke of falseness; she thought the smile on her lips was a cruel smile. Heartless she felt certain she must be, or how could she have injured one so grievously as Henry Marsden said she had? She felt sure it must have been a sorry deed that could make him speak so unrelentingly.

Maria Langen was, as Dacia Singleton had remarked, a handsome woman; rather below the middle stature, with a slight well-made figure;

her hair was black, of that peculiar blue-black that is so rare amongst English women. Her eyes were large and full, and of a dark brown; they could look soft and loving, but that was not their natural expression—at all events not now, whatever it might have been in days of yore. Her nose was large, her lips thin and straight, but of a bright red—almost too bright to be natural; her complexion clear, and without the aid of art, pale, but generally the cheeks were suffused with a delicate blush that never varied. But her great attraction lay in her manner, which, when she pleased, was singularly fascinating, and when she chose, few could resist: women as well as men succumbed to her influence. She was also endowed with the knowledge of dressing well; probably acquired in some other country than her own.

“If you knew Henry Marsden half as well as I once did,” she said, “you would admit what I say. Poor fellow! It is sad to see the state he is in: I hardly think I should have recognised him, had I not heard his name announced; he is so terribly altered.”

"He does look very ill. You have known him then for some time?" asked Miss Singleton.

"Yes, some time," she replied absently. "I knew him abroad."

"He told me he was obliged to winter abroad. Where did you meet him?"

"O, you are curious about his antecedents, are you?" said the Countess in a bantering tone, which she felt perfectly certain was one calculated to make Dacia cease her questioning. "Cecily," she continued across the room to Mrs. Moncrieffe, who was disputing with her doctor,—"Cecily, Mr. Marsden's pale interesting face has made an impression, I think, in this quarter;" and she glanced round at Dacia Singleton as she spoke.

"Dacia need not accuse other people of flirting any more," said Mrs. Moncrieffe, "for I am sure she has done pretty well herself for one night."

"I think Dacia the last person in the world to flirt," said James Moncrieffe; who was always good-natured enough to come to the help of the distressed.

"Hold your tongue, James; you know nothing about it. How should you?" said his wife.

"Why, because you give me plenty of opportunity of judging," was the retort.

"Mr. Reeves, I wish to goodness you would cure James of talking nonsense."

"And his wife of acting it!" replied, more sensibly than politely, her medical adviser; but it was said so that it only reached her own ears; and then something more was added that caused Mrs. Moncrieffe to reply, with a pretty, pouting, spoilt-child look:

"You are horribly rude; and you always are."

Mrs. Singleton at this point stated she felt so fatigued—and she looked so, in good truth—she would retire, without, she hoped, disturbing any one else. So gathering her shawl a little closer round her, and smelling-bottle in hand, she bowed to the company collectively, and slowly disappeared.

"Dacia, you go up with mamma," said her sister. "You can come back again, you know; only just see that she has all she wants."

Dacia went, but did not return; she too

was longing for rest; and though she had to put up with a good half-hour's complaints from her mother as to her doing nothing to make herself useful, and so on, she, when she was let, fell into a deep sound sleep, that lasted uninterruptedly till she was awoke by Maxwell's banging about the water-cans against the baths as she prepared them for use. Servants seem incapable of doing things quietly.

The following day, Thursday, Mrs. Moncrieffe considered herself thoroughly victimised, being obliged to attend to her mother's wishes, and accompany her on her shopping expedition. Cecily had become more selfish since her marriage than she was even before. From the moment she became the wife of an Honourable, she looked on herself as *très grande dame*; and though from her birth she had been accustomed to the same comforts and luxuries wealth always insures, she was but the daughter of a country squire—true, of a very ancient family—but totally free from noble blood. Now having married a weak, foolish, shallow-brained man, for whom she never felt any real affection, and

toleration being the only feeling—if feeling there was of any kind in the matter—that after five years of married life she entertained for him, she yet enjoyed, and that thoroughly, the consciousness that her name was down in the Peerage, and that she might class herself amongst those that some people term the Upper Ten Thousand. Because of this, she thought she might give herself airs, and frequently indulged in showing off before those she considered inferior in rank and position.

Mrs. Singleton was not at all the sort of woman to see this fault in her daughter, and I much doubt if in any case she would have considered it in that light; not so Mrs. Ewart, who, much to Mrs. Moncrieffe's discomfiture, made her appearance at the very moment she had resolved to throw her mother over, for the sake of joining Countess Langen in some expedition that lady was bent on fulfilling.

There was a good quarter of an hour's squabbling as to who was to go in the barouche, and who in the brougham.

“I cannot drive in an open carriage such a

day as this," said Mrs. Singleton with a shiver, and drawing her shawl closely round her.

"But, mamma, the brougham will not hold more than two; so of course I cannot go with you," replied Cis.

"And why not? You and I are but two."

"But Dacia of course wants to go."

"Pray do not mind me. All I have to do, I can do walking; and I daresay Mum will go with me. Will you, Mum?" said Dacia, turning to her aunt.

"Do drive with me, Miss Singleton," said the Countess Langen. "I should so enjoy your being with me; and it will be dreadfully dull for me all alone."

But Dacia declined. She thought of what Henry Marsden had said. The words, "I would not allow a sister of mine to sit down in the same room with her," flashed across her memory; and moreover she did not care to run the chance of his seeing her driving by the side of one of whom he had so spoken.

At last all was settled; not as was wished, but still it was settled. And after two false starts by

Mrs. Singleton and Mrs. Moncrieffe, they were fairly off. Then Madame Langen went her way, leaving Mrs. Ewart and Dacia in quiet possession of the house.

"I suppose we had better go ourselves now," said Mrs. Ewart.

"What hour do people most generally pay visits at in London?" asked Dacia, but making no sign of a move.

The aunt looked at the niece. She did not in one sense comprehend her. The meaning of her question was quite intelligible, but not its drift.

"Why do you ask? Generally about this time."

Dacia told her why, simply and shortly.

"And you wish to see Mr. Marsden, if he calls?"

"I want *you* to see him, Mum."

"Then, my dear, your want is already administered to. I have seen him, and often."

Dacia was silent for a moment; then she said, looking up at her aunt, whilst a blush spread over her face, "I should like to see him again myself."

It was now Mrs. Ewart's turn to be silent; and when, after a few minutes, she looked round at Dacia with the intention of speaking, there was an anxious look on her kindly face—a plain face, it is true; but at that moment the soft tender expression over it lent it a beauty no feature could give.

“Henry Marsden cannot live many years; I sometimes think, after seeing him, not many months.”

The words may read curt and hard, but they did not sound so; they were spoken in a gentle pitying tone. We may all know how much the manner of saying a thing influences the effect it causes.

“I fear he cannot. I thought last night death seemed to have set its stamp on his fine intellectual face. It made me sad to look at him. Mum darling, don't mistake my seeming interest in him for more than what I should feel for any one in his state, and that I have known but for a few short hours. I don't think you need fear my falling in love with him,” she said more gaily; “not if I saw him daily for the next twelve months.

I cannot tell you what has attracted me more to him than any one I ever saw before; but I actually enjoyed myself last night, and I believe simply because of him; and I have a great desire to see him once again. You know, Mum, probably we shall never meet again on earth; therefore it can do no great injury seeing him to-day, if he calls."

Dacia then detailed to Mrs. Ewart the part of the conversation she had held with Henry Marsden relative to the Countess Langen. Before, however, she had done more than give a rough outline of it, he was himself announced.

"I heard you were here, Mrs. Ewart," he said, shaking hands with her cordially, "or I hardly think I should have dared to intrude."

"We were going out; but my niece told me you were likely to call, and so we waited for you," said Mrs. Ewart, always peculiarly plain-spoken.

"Well, Mum, hardly that," said Miss Singleton, who did not fail to read a look of intense gratification in the glance Henry Marsden cast towards her. "We were not *waiting* for you, Mr. Marsden."

She smiled as she addressed him—a soft pitying

smile, that went straight to the poor fellow's heart. It would have been better for him never to have met Dacia Singleton again. However little injury it might inflict on her, it was otherwise with him. She meant nothing by the gentle, almost tender tone she used in speaking to him. All *she* felt was, that she was talking to one whose days on earth were numbered, and therefore whose every wish and desire she would have gratified, had it lay in her power. With him, however, it was very different. He mistook her manner, mistook her motives, mistook the impulse that prompted her well-intentioned kindness.

It was a long happy hour Henry Marsden passed that afternoon; and though he felt a momentary pang as he held Dacia's small hand in his and bid her farewell, he was no sooner out of the house than a thousand wild projects were formed which would enable him soon again to see that beautiful face that had so innocently forced its way into his heart.

His very state of health rendered him more impetuous in his feelings, more eager to gain a prize that, having set a priceless value on, he was

the more resolute to leave no human effort untried to gain. He never thought of the utter selfishness his new-born love brought to light. To bind one to him that he must inwardly know would, did he do so, soon be left alone in the world, unprotected and desolate, never seemed to strike him. Perhaps in the first flush of the moment he forgot his desperate state. However that may be, he floated on in a dreamy happy manner, for many days to come, in what the clear-seeing world would call a fool's paradise.

The fool's paradise, however, is not to be despised. If, like the oasis in the desert, it renders one less resigned to the after-toil and exposure, it has at all events this advantage—that it gives one the repose necessary to induce the strength required for the dreary task that may lie before us.

For a time Marsden's friends were surprised at the sudden change that had come over him; his new-found happiness seemed to have stayed the destroying disease for the time being; he seemed as much improved physically as he felt himself to be mentally. Once, and once only, did

he give way to a temporary depression. It was after a farewell visit he had paid Mrs. Moncrieffe previous to his departure for Cannes; as he was leaving the house, he met the Countess Langen going into it; then he asked himself whether it was possible Dacia Singleton could deceive him as that woman had done his friend. Reason prevailed after a little while, and he felt satisfied that *she* would never be aught but what was pure and truthful. Then he wandered off happily to his fool's paradise, conjuring up such vivid pictures of happiness in his old and beautiful northern home, with Dacia Singleton by his side as his loving and lovely wife, that he would willingly have gone on for the remaining short span of his life unawakened to sombre sad reality.

Here we must leave him for the present, and return to more matter-of-fact and every-day occurrences.

CHAPTER V.

OPPOSITIONS.

THE shopping was completed. The alpaca, the needles and pins, were all bought, besides a dozen other things that Mrs. Singleton considered necessary for her own personal comfort; yet she did not speak of the morrow as the day which was to witness her bid adieu to her native country and friends. It was very natural that she should feel a dread of the last step that was to sever her from ties of more than forty years' standing; very natural she should be loth to leave all the comforts she was surrounded by, for—Heaven only knew what. Yet her complaints when uttered were not such as would command sympathy; she talked always of what *she* would have to endure and bear; she wailed over what *her* personal privations would be; she never thought of Dacia in the matter. What did it matter for a young

girl? All places were alike to young people; they never even appreciated comforts if they had them. How often had not Dacia preferred donning a short skirt and thick boots, and umbrella in hand, start off on a cold winter's day, with the snow falling fast around her, for the purpose of sitting by the side of some poor sick cottager, and reading or speaking words of comfort, to remaining in her own comfortable warm room, with the last new novel at her command?

Poor Dacia! One of her heart's sorrows on leaving the home of her childhood was the fear that many would miss her, and perhaps in a more sensible manner than the hearing of her voice, for many a shilling did she make her pocket-money pay toll on entering the dwellings of her less-favoured fellow-creatures. But there was no sympathy for Dacia; no thought of what a life she might have before, her compared with that she had hitherto led, unless, indeed, it was Mrs. Ewart who sighed inwardly at her darling's dreary prospects.

Dacia, whatever she felt herself, spoke cheerily enough; she did not care to give way or encourage

any depression she felt, by giving way to it in words, and at the same time paining others. This very unselfishness called forth remarks from her mother that it required all her self-command to refrain from replying to ; but she bore on bravely, determined not to despond at all events till she found every thing in her new home as wretched as she expected.

“Mum,” said Cecily, falling back on her aunt, as was her wont in her need, though she avoided her as much as possible at other times, “don’t you think you had better settle with mamma about the hour she will start to-morrow?”

“No, I don’t think any thing of the kind,” replied Mrs. Ewart, who, like every one, however good-natured they may be, disliked being made use of in so unmistakable a manner as Cis invariably did it in : “I don’t at all see what I have to do with the matter.”

“O, Mum dear, do please talk to her,” said Mrs. Moncrieffe, in a pretty coaxing manner ; “you know she will be so angry with me if I say a word about it, and declare I want to get rid of her, and all that sort of thing.”

“Well, but it seems you do want ‘all that sort of thing.’ Supposing your mother does not intend going to-morrow ; I heard something about staying over Sunday.”

Cecily at first looked blank, but after a moment’s reflection her countenance cleared up. She had evidently thought of some expedient that would serve her purpose. So, humming a French air, she went to her writing-table, stood whilst she scrawled off a note, addressed it, sealed it carefully, and finally ringing the bell, desired the servant to send it immediately to its destination.

Mrs. Ewart saw all, but said nothing. She sat quietly unravelling a piece of string that had got into a knotted state of uselessness. She was remaining to dinner to-day at James Moncrieffe’s especial request ; she was an immense favourite with him. Dacia, knowing her aunt would probably be alone, hurried down to join her in the drawing-room. Mrs. Moncrieffe was leaving the room to dress, as it wanted but a short time to the usual dinner hour, as her sister went in.

“I am afraid, Cis, mamma will not go before

Monday," said Dacia, who had perfectly seen her sister's desire to get rid of them.

"Don't you think she will? Well, I suppose you will be very glad."

"No, I am very sorry," replied her sister quietly. "I think the sooner mamma faces all her troubles the better."

"What are you girls talking about?" said James Moncrieffe, appearing at the top of the stairs whilst the two sisters stood in the open doorway.

"Nothing that concerns you," replied his wife. "How horribly you smell of smoke, James!"

This accusation Mrs. Moncrieffe made to turn the discussion from touching on her mother's departure in her husband's presence. She knew full well he would urge her to remain as long as she felt disposed to do so.

"Well, you generally seem to like it when it emanates from any of those gentlemen with unpronounceable names that your friend the Countess has introduced to you. I wish they were all at the devil!" he added in a lower tone, as he passed by his wife and sister-in-law and went into the

drawing-room, when his face instantly brightened as he saw Mrs. Ewart sitting there; and, much to Dacia's vexation, sat beside her, thus destroying her own anticipated *tête-à-tête*.

They were all assembled and waiting for dinner, when the servant came in and spoke to Mrs. Moncrieffe. She instantly rose and left the room.

"What's she up to now, I wonder?" said her husband.

"Really, James, you are enough to torment any woman to death," said Mrs. Singleton. "I am sure if my poor husband had ever gone on as you do, I should have taken leave of my senses;" and Mrs. Singleton found the very thoughts of what the consequences of such treatment might have been necessitate the use of her smelling-bottle.

James Moncrieffe thought the chances would have been with him as with his late father-in-law—he would have succumbed, and not the lady.

"I think Cis does pretty well as she likes," was all he said.

"I think you are a pattern husband, Mr. Moncrieffe," remarked laughingly Countess Lan-

gen, who desired rather to conciliate him. But the compliment fell on stony ground. Mr. Moncrieffe did not like Madame Langen, and it was all he could do to disguise the feeling.

Mrs. Moncrieffe returned, bustling into the room with a little flurried fussy manner, and followed by her good-looking doctor.

"Mr. Reeves came to attend to a little business for me," she said; "so I have insisted on his staying to dinner."

"Really, Reeves, I must make you welcome, if it were for no other reason than your keeping my wife in such wonderful health; but whether from medicine you do give her or medicine you don't, I am sure I cannot tell," said his not over-courteous host.

"I think the latter; is it not, Mrs. Moncrieffe?"

"I am sure I don't know; but any way it is no business of James's."

"O, dear, no; none at all! Nothing seems of much business to me in this house."

Cecily Moncrieffe looked vexed, and her husband, who was an utter fool as regarded her—if intense blind affection makes a man a fool—was

now anxious to dissipate the cloud he had gathered over her pretty face ; so he was civil to the doctor, and talked to Countess Langen, and Cis became herself again.

The dinner passed off well enough. Later in the evening, when they were assembled in the drawing-room, and Madame Langen was entertaining them at the piano—she was a brilliant performer, but nothing more ; there was no sentiment in her music—Mr. Reeves approached Mrs. Singleton, and began to ask some commonplace questions about her journey. Mrs. Moncrieffe betook herself to the other end of the room, and called Dacia to look over some photographs she had recently purchased. Mrs. Ewart and James Moncrieffe were having a quiet chat over his home troubles—not very serious ones, as he made them out—so that the doctor and Mrs. Singleton were left to themselves.

Presently, certainly before ten minutes had elapsed, Mrs. Singleton called out in as loud a tone as she ever raised her voice to, “Cecily, I shall be obliged to leave to-morrow. I must go to-morrow ; it is very, very hard, but it cannot be helped.”

"Why, mamma?" asked Cis, coming towards the sofa her mother and Reeves were sitting on.

"Why! Because Mr. Reeves tells me that next week there will be an opposition company started, and they are going to run steamers across from Dover to Calais; and the consequence will be—O, dear, I hardly know what! All sorts of troubles and misfortunes. They start at the same hour; and that the people belonging to each would most likely do as once happened before—nearly tear off the passengers' clothes in trying to drag them on board their boats, and that they will even offer to take you for nothing rather than resign you to their rivals."

This long speech—not by any means spoken without the interruptions necessary for the use of the smelling-bottle—quite exhausted the poor lady; she leaned back, not alone from fatigue, but from a sort of feeling that now she could fight against her fate no more, she would give in quietly.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Cis, looking perfectly dismayed. "Are you quite sure, Mr. Reeves?—That would be dreadful, mamma: you could never stand that; nor must you run any such risk."

"No, my dear," replied her mother, closing her eyes; "it would kill me."

The very thought seemed to make her cheek pale. The picture Mr. Reeves had drawn of the matter was certainly one calculated to make a tolerably strong-minded woman pause before she ran the chance of encountering it; but to one of Mrs. Singleton's temperament it was beyond measure terrifying.

"Are you perfectly sure your information is correct, Mr. Reeves?" asked Mrs. Ewart; and there was a peculiar tone and expression in her voice and face as she spoke, that Cecily noticed, and, I think, quite understood.

"It is in all the papers," replied Mr. Reeves; "their advertisements take up too much space for it to be a mere rumour. I think, Mrs. Ewart, it is correct, though I should be sorry Mrs. Singleton acted only on my information."

"O, I am sure you are right, Mr. Reeves—quite sure; Mrs. Ewart never reads the papers, and so can know nothing about it," replied Mrs. Singleton.

"Why, mamma," said Dacia, who could never

bear a word said that sounded disparagingly of her aunt, "Mum spells through the—"

"Hold your tongue, Dacia; you always talk so much.—I shall be knocked up for weeks to come after this journey. I intended sleeping at Dover, and now that will be impossible; I have not the strength to go through so much."

"And yet it is but a short journey from here to Calais; the whole thing won't take you more than five hours."

"Five hours! O dear, you do not know what five hours passed in being either rattled to pieces or in staggering up and down damp boards, and surrounded by the most unpleasant scenes, is. You can't picture such misery, unless you were a weak delicate woman like myself.—Dacia, come here; don't go away just as you are wanted.—What time must we leave to-morrow, Mr. Reeves?"

Dacia hoped to escape from her mother's wailing; but it was never an easy matter to do that.

"I cannot tell you; but I should advise your leaving Dover by the first boat. It will be better for you, as the days are short now and the evenings damp and foggy," replied Mr. Reeves.

"But I cannot get up early ; I am ill for days after if I am disturbed before my usual time in the morning. But never mind.—Tell Maxwell, Dacia, *she* must be prepared, and all the things ready, the first thing in the morning. Go and tell her at once, that she may begin packing."

When Dacia was gone, Mrs. Singleton again turned to Mr. Reeves, as a last hope struck her : "Don't you think this horrid opposition will be over in a day or two, and we might wait ? Indeed it would be so much better to do that, till all was calm and settled again."

"My dear madam, when these things begin they last sometimes for weeks, and every day makes them worse. I am sure you are doing what is wise and right in fixing to leave to-morrow."

Mrs. Singleton sighed, and tried to resign herself.

"I am so sorry, mamma ; but as you must go, it is much better you should do so when you can make the journey quietly and without running any risks, as you would do if you delayed."

"Have you a Bradshaw, Mrs. Moncrieffe ?" asked Mr. Reeves.

"A Bradshaw! no; what in the world would be the use of a Bradshaw to me! I have an ABC book, if that will do," she replied, looking up with a pretty and well-pleased smile, and a look he seemed to understand.

"No, I am afraid that will not do; however, I will ascertain the exact hours on my return home, and will send it up to you at once, and therefore I will wish you good-night."

After the doctor was gone, there was no end of propositions started and plans proposed—all of which, however, met with objections from Mrs. Singleton; so it was thought best to leave her alone, and let her carry out Mr. Reeves' suggestion. His paper, with hours and minutes written down most distinctly, soon appeared; and it was finally settled that they were to start by the early morning express, so as to reach Dover in time for the first boat.

"Well, mamma, one good thing by that plan—you will avoid sleeping on the road; for you will of course, on landing, take the train straight on to Dunkerque."

"I shall do no such thing, Cecily. After two

such journeys, one by land and the other by sea, to think of taking a third is out of all reason. But you have no consideration, no thought for my state—not a bit more than Dacia. I am sure I don't know how I shall be able to get up in time."

CHAPTER VI.

ACROSS THE CHANNEL.

THERE was something very honest in Robert Reeves' face; it was a truthful, genuine countenance: one felt as if one could place implicit trust in all he said and did; there was even a frankness in his tone of voice, that had its weight. We are terribly apt to be led away by what is pleasing, and be deceived by outward appearances. Certainly the doctor was not worthy of half the good faith that was placed in him, chiefly on account of his being under the influence of a pretty woman; he would have been as true as he was supposed to be but for that misfortune. Not that he was the least in love with Cecily Monerieffe—such an idea was as far from his thoughts as sunset is from dawn—yet, considering the many follies he was guilty of on that lady's account, it was somewhat hard to define what his exact sentiments towards her were.

I am inclined to think it was a mere gratification of vanity he indulged in, and that no other feeling prompted or biased him. It is curious to note the wonderful power a woman can gain over a man, if she chooses to exert herself. There is very little she cannot make him do, if she begins at the right end, that is, finding out his weak point, and if she can manage to keep her heart cool as well as her head. There was little fear of Cis Moncrieffe erring in *that* way, though she liked Robert Reeves quite well enough for her purpose, which enabled her to be winning and attractive in her manner, and so mould him into any shaped tool she required. She became acquainted with him very soon after her marriage, and the pretty wayward wife became a very pleasing study. Cecily herself would as soon have thought of falling in love with her doctor as she would with the humdrum parson under whom she sat every Sunday, listening to long dreary sermons; but it was quite worth her while to try and please the one, though she would have laughed if you had told her to be agreeable to the other. When she first became a wife, she thought a married woman

receiving attention—if beyond ordinary civility—from any other man than her husband, a terrible wrong; but she got over this, and like many another, after a five years' cruise in London society, entertained widely different opinions.

It was not, however, till Mrs. Moncrieffe became the intimate friend of the Countess Langen that her actions commenced to tally with her hitherto simply thoughtless manner. It is as impossible to have daily intercourse with one of easy morals and not imbibe some of the evil consequent upon their possession, as to meddle with a sack of soot and expect not to be soiled. Madame Langen had no intention of doing Cecily any harm, but she had opened a door for her, from whence she showed her new scenes, which would, were she to wander amidst them, be productive of hitherto unknown and unthought-of pleasures; and because Cecily was weak and foolish enough to pass through the door, the Countess was not wholly responsible for her doing so. Had she happened to find in Cecily a woman firmly rooted in good, spotless principles, it might have opened her own eyes to the brink of sorrow that

lies beyond the fair landscape of the moment, instead of the other being misguided.

But to return to Mrs. Singleton. The doctor would certainly have regretted the active part he took in persuading her to start at so unconscionable an hour, could he have been a witness to the poor lady's distress in the morning. To get up in time to catch the train, it was necessary to do so by candle-light; and to add to the wretchedness of that proceeding, it was cold and raining; in short, nothing could be drearier than the whole business.

"I must have a fire, Maxwell; I cannot possibly get up such a cold bitter morning without one. I wonder you thought of my doing so; though I ought not to be astonished, for no one ever considers my comfort."

"Well, ma'am, I'm sure I don't know where the fire's to come from; there's not a soul up in the house, and I don't know where to find coals, or wood, or paper, or any thing."

Maxwell was a tall, consequential, grand kind of personage, and usually managed Mrs. Singleton better than any one else; but if Dacia, or indeed any one, happened to be present, Maxwell rarely

came off successfully ; and Dacia at this moment was in the miserable enjoyment of a cold bath—it is utterly impossible for any one even to pretend to like a cold bath by candle-light.

“Then you must go and call some of the servants up, and make them tell you where you can find all you require. You should have seen to every thing being ready in the room last night.”

“Well, you’ll miss the train, that’s all,” said Maxwell, swinging out of the room and banging the door after her with such violence that the noise was sufficient to rouse all in the house—except the servants, for nothing short of a bodily shake seems to effect that object.

When Dacia issued from behind her temporarily-erected screen, her mother fell to work on her, taunting her with forgetfulness and heartlessness in not having seen there was a fire, she knowing full well that the want of it might produce an illness, arising from cold, that she might never get over. Dacia, with her teeth chattering from her own sufferings, owned it never crossed her mind ; and it would have been strange if she had, considering she had never before occupied the same

room with her mother, and was always carefully excluded from her apartments; so that she would no more have thought of giving directions for any thing concerning Mrs. Singleton's personal arrangements within the hitherto forbidden precincts than she would of offering to do so for the people residing next door.

Dacia, however, was quite ready to allow it was very cold—too cold for her mother to be without a fire; and so hurrying on with her own toilet, she went herself on Maxwell's track to see what could be done. Of course when that dignified person saw that Miss Singleton was not above groping about in search of firing, she put her own shoulder forward, and soon a coal-seuttle was found, with wood and paper in it as well as coals, evidently placed ready by a careful housemaid to light the morning fires, but which was instantly taken possession of by Maxwell and carried up to Mrs. Singleton's room, where, by the time she was ready to leave it, there burnt a bright, cheerful fire.

“It's easy to see,” remarked Maxwell, whilst she was laying out Mrs. Singleton's various gar-

ments before the fire, "there's not much management in this house."

"What do you mean?" asked her mistress, who was always ready to talk to her if they were alone; and Miss Singleton had betaken herself to the dining-room.

"Why, ma'am, just look at the waste that goes on. If you could have seen the kitchen just now, you would have been quite surprised. I never saw such a thing in my life; every thing left from our suppers still standing on the table, the dessert and wine from the dining-room all lying about and uncovered; it's quite a shame. If Mrs. Moncrieffe did as you do, ma'am, she would save hundreds a year, I am quite sure."

But this did not in any way interest Mrs. Singleton; her daughter being cheated by her servants, and the things being wasted, were matters of no moment to her; so the subject dropped, Maxwell not being able to keep it up by herself, and her mistress asked no questions. It was as well; for she succeeded in forwarding her preparations for departure, which at one moment stood a fair chance of being incomplete when the

time for starting arrived. However, at half-past seven Mrs. Singleton and her daughter were comfortably seated in the brougham, and James Moncrieffe uncomfortably perched on a mushroom-shaped seat between them, for he insisted on seeing them off; and they arrived in time for the mail-train to Dover.

This they reached in ample time to get on board the Vivid, which, true to its name, performed the short but intensely unpleasant journey rapidly and well, landing its sick-of-the-sea passengers in safety, and with a feeling of charity burning in each one's breast. Why is it that one feels so amiable and obliging on landing after a short sea-voyage, and doubly so if we have suffered during the passage? No one has ever explained it to me, but it is so: one feels as if one could grasp the hand of an enemy in friendship; one would even do a good turn to the steward, who lied to us with the blindest possible face, telling us we had but fifteen minutes before we should get into the harbour, when we had precisely forty-five of heavy rolling misery to endure.

Mrs. Moncrieffe's leave-taking with her mother and sister was not very heart-rending.

"Good-bye, mamma; good-bye, Dacia: be sure and write as soon as you arrive and tell me how you like the place and the people, and remember me to Mrs. Percival; and mind, if you *will* stop in Calais, that you go to Dessin's Hotel—it's by far the best and most comfortable. I gave Maxwell directions to be sure and take some sandwiches and sherry with her, that you might have something to take on your journey. Good-bye, good-bye!" and with a kiss to each, the parting was over.

Poor Mrs. Singleton felt bitterly at that moment her altered position—felt it thoroughly for the first time. Ease, affluence, and comfort were all gradually vanishing from her, whilst she saw rising dimly—and as time went on, coming out more defined and distinct—the hard sharp edges and rough uneven corners that small means invariably produce, and that extravagant notions and habits render ten times sharper and rougher when brought in contact with.

Dacia saw her mother's tear-dimmed eyes, and

her own were full as she gently and tenderly put her hand within Mrs. Singleton's, and said :

“ Dearest mamma, I will do all and every thing in my power to make you feel Cecily's loss as lightly as possible.”

But Dacia, with all her affection, could not alter her mother's irritable disposition ; therefore, though she felt pained, she was hardly surprised when she said in reply :

“ If you don't think more for me, and of my comforts, when we are in that detestable place than you did this morning, you won't do much.”

“ I will at all events try,” said Dacia, resolved nothing should daunt her in her determination to render her mother's life as bearable as she could.

More than once it had been a matter of wonder to her that her sister had never offered to increase her mother's small income ; and more than once had she had it on the tip of her tongue to speak to Mrs. Monerieffe on the subject ; but the knowledge that any benefit in that form conferred on her would to a certain extent benefit herself deterred her from doing so. As to Cis she would

as soon have thought of handing over her house and servants to her mother as one shilling of her income. It was not in her. She was not altogether to blame, as it was her nature to think of herself and nothing but herself. She was Mrs. Singleton over again in that respect; only it seemed more hateful in the younger than in the elder woman. Cecily's selfishness was more evident; Mrs. Singleton's was partially hidden by the cloak of bad health.

The moment they landed in Calais Dacia asked her mother what she meant to do,—whether to stay or go on; if the former, should they go to Dessin's?

A man who was standing near them at the moment she spoke shouted in their ears the information that the Hôtel de Flandre was the best hotel; that Dessin's was a long way off, &c. &c.; and so to the Hôtel de Flandre they must go, unless they intended by main force to withstand his importunities, as by this time he had succeeded in pushing Dacia gently but very determinedly towards an omnibus that was standing close by. Had it happened to have been Mrs. Singleton

instead of her daughter he had laid his hand on, the Hôtel de Flandre would never have received their patronage. But as it was, she was only too well pleased to be able to put up at any house but the one Cecily Moncrieffe had told her to be sure and stop at. She had never set her foot in Calais before; consequently Dessin's was of no more account to her than any other hotel; and her dislike of ever doing any thing that was recommended to her as advisable was so inherent in her nature, that if a possibility ever showed itself of following some other course, she never let it pass.

The horribly noisy and rough drive to the hotel, which was some hundred yards farther distant from the harbour than Dessin's, instead of being nearer, by no means tended to soothe or tranquillise a person of nervous temperament; so by the time they were rattled over the paved entrance into the court-yard of the hotel, poor Mrs. Singleton was fairly knocked up, bodily as well as mentally. Till the omnibus ceased its noisy motion, not a word had been spoken, inasmuch as it was evident to both mother and daughter that their voices would be no more heard than

falling rain by the side of a rushing torrent ; but when mine host, a tall handsome man, opened the door to let the new arrivals alight, Mrs. Singleton found herself hardly capable of moving.

“To think that I should ever have lived to arrive at such a state as this, and be reduced to drive in a horrible vehicle of this kind ! Dacia, it will kill me—I am sure it will !”

And poor Dacia, knowing what she had herself endured, really thought, considering her mother’s fragileness, that such a result was not altogether impossible. But by dint of help Mrs. Singleton was got out, and taken into a room even with the court-yard, large and dreary-looking. Maxwell, who had remained behind with a commissioner, to see the luggage pass through the Custom-house, on coming in and seeing where her mistress was located—she whose delicate foot had never trod on other than softly carpeted floors—exclaimed :

“Well, I’m sure, ma’am, if this is the sort of barrack they put you in, I wonder what they’ll give me.”

“Never mind, Maxwell,” said Miss Singleton ;

“we must try and make mamma as comfortable as possible ; I think a glass of wine would do her good. Go and see if they have any sherry.”

Sherry ! Poor Dacia ! Sherry at the Hôtel de Flandre !

“No, miss,” said Maxwell, returning from her errand. “But they have Marsala, if you know what that is; and they have this, that looks like port; so I told them to give me a glass for my mistress to try; it will do her more good than the other stuff.”

“That is claret,” exclaimed Dacia, tasting it; “and horribly sour stuff too ! . Dear me, Maxwell, mamma can’t drink that; what is to be done? Go and get the Marsala.”

Mrs. Singleton in the mean time was lying on a long large sofa, covered with red velvet: her bonnet was removed, otherwise all her wraps were still on her; her eyes were closed, but her smelling-bottle was doing its duty.

“Would you like a fire, mamma?” said Dacia, going to her mother’s side. “I think the room might look more comfortable with one; otherwise it feels very warm.”

“ Warm ! ” said Mrs. Singleton captiously, but in a very low tone. “ I am perished with the cold ! ”

Dacia resolved to go herself and see if she could not get something for her mother to take ; she felt a conviction that under the circumstances a slight stimulant would do her more good than any thing else. As she crossed the court, the great big stones it was paved with hurt her feet ; and in order to get over them as quickly as possible, she hastened her steps so much that the master of the hotel, seeing her making towards the *bureau*, came out to meet her.

She told her requirements more comprehensively than Maxwell had done, and he very wisely suggested some hot brandy and water ; at any rate their brandy was pure and good. And when Maxwell brought it, Mrs. Singleton was persuaded to drink a good tumblerful ; after which she rapidly became very warm, less irritable, and finally fell into a sound refreshing sleep.

“ Law, miss, what a good thought that brandy was, to be sure ! It will do your mamma all the good in the world to get this sleep. But what a room ! Isn’t it, miss ? ”

“Well, it does not look very comfortable,” replied Dacia in the same under-tone Maxwell had spoken in. “The sand is the worst: if it had but a carpet, it would not be so bad; it will look less cheerless when the fire is lighted.”

It did look wretched and dreary to one so unaccustomed to any thing of the kind as Miss Singleton, but she tried to make the best of it. The two narrow, high, curtainless beds, with their coverings drawn down and tucked in so tightly at the sides that they seemed like any thing but beds, and comfortless in the extreme; but here their looks belied them. The tiny wash-stand with its miniature white-china fittings; the strange mixture of common furniture with velvet-covered sofa and chairs, but all wearing a hard tight look; the sand-covered floor; the bare cold-looking walls; altogether it was not an enlivening spot to have first set foot in across the Channel, after living in an English home and with inborn English tastes.

Presently there was a tremendous noise in the yard—horses’ feet, coach-wheels, men’s voices, all clattering together.

“Good gracious! what can have happened?”

said Maxwell, rushing from the opposite end of the room, where she was employed in unpacking a box, to the window, to see what on earth could have caused such a disturbance. Miss Singleton also looked out. The cause was a very simple one. It was merely getting the same omnibus ready that had brought them from the steamer, to go and meet the Paris train, which was shortly due.

“Of course it’s awoke your mamma, miss,” said Maxwell, in an injured tone. “I knew it would. Just as if they couldn’t do all that somewhere else, and not just in front of these windows.”

“What is the matter?” inquired Mrs. Singleton, in a half-sleepy, half-angry tone.

“Why, ma’am, it’s that horrid omnibus again.”

“We must ask for another room for you, mamma; for if that omnibus is constantly coming in and out, I am afraid the noise would be very annoying to you.”

“Of course I must have another room; I never heard such a deafening noise.—Maxwell,

go and see about one at once; and say I *must* have a carpet in it."

Maxwell was absent an excessively long time; too long for Mrs. Singleton's patience to hold out. At last, when she did come back, she expressed a supposition that the other room was ready for her as well as secured.

"Indeed, ma'am, it's no such thing. I have just been all over the house, and a great rambling place it is too, but there's not a room in it that has more carpet in it than this one; there are strips in front of the beds, and no more; treating them like fire-places, and putting rugs before them; and the moment you put your foot on them they slide away; and I nearly fell twice. I never did see such a place. Lor, ma'am, I wish you had gone to the other Mrs. Moneriette told you of; however, they speak English here, that's one comfort, and perhaps they don't there."

"But about the rooms, Maxwell?" said Miss Singleton, thinking it time to stop Maxwell's chattering.

"Well, miss, there are only two others unoccupied, and madame says you may have your

choice ; but I think them horrid. This is a beauty compared to them. But will you please come, Miss Singleton? perhaps you won't think them so bad."

Dacia went ; she agreed, however, with Maxwell, her mother was best where she was. The great drawback was the noise in the court-yard, and this she ascertained went on with but short intervals during the whole twenty-four hours.

"Would you like me to sleep in one of the beds in this room, by you, mamma, or would you rather have Maxwell?" asked Dacia towards bedtime.

"Have Maxwell! Do you take me for a lunatic, and that I want a keeper with me?" exclaimed Mrs. Singleton indignantly. "I don't know what you mean, Dacia, by proposing a servant to sleep in my room. You may sleep here, if you choose, as perhaps you may feel lonely if you are put a great way off."

Dacia replied with a gentle "Very well, mamma;" but she was beginning to feel terribly depressed, and tired too; therefore her mother's temper had more effect on her than it would at

another time. She had feared to offer her own company without suggesting Maxwell as well, or she knew full well her mother would accuse her of some selfish motive.

It was a hard sorry task the poor girl had before her, to contend alone with the irritability and selfishness to which Mrs. Singleton now more than ever gave way. How, when she laid her weary head down that night, did she think of her sister's happier fate! and yet Cecily Moncrieffe did not seem to appreciate her good fortune, Dacia thought. But so it ever is: what we possess ceases to be valued after we have become accustomed to it; whilst what we desire and cannot obtain is, and continues to be, inestimable.

CHAPTER VII.

A BRITISH PARSON.

It was a bright fresh morning when Dacia awoke; the sun's rays were gleaming through the divisions of the green venetian blinds, producing narrow gray bars across the room, making one fancy by the floating mist the sun's bright light rendered distinct to the eye that the whole room must be in a suffocating state of dustiness. Miss Singleton was rapidly roused from any dreamy, dozy state she might otherwise have indulged in by seeing her mother nearly dressed, and Maxwell entering the room, bearing a tray with a couple of huge white cups and saucers, but so thick they barely held an ordinary teacup full, and two big tin coffee-pots; one, however, contained hot milk.

“Good gracious me! what time is it? You up, mamma, and I still in bed!” And Dacia seemed scared at the bare thought of such an event.

“Up! yes, I have been up half the night. I am sure, Dacia, I cannot understand how you could sleep through the frightful noise that went on almost incessantly. I called you several times, but I could not awake you. I might have died, for all the good you would have been.”

“I am very sorry, mamma; I hope you wanted nothing. I know I am a very sound sleeper.”

“If I had not wanted something I should not have called you; but it does not matter now. I ought never to expect that any one will think for me; I have never found them do it yet, and I daresay I never shall. We leave here at twelve o’clock, Dacia; so you had better get up if you wish to be ready, for nothing shall induce me to stay in this place a minute longer than I can absolutely avoid.”

Dacia required no second bidding. In a short hour she was ready to go any where or do any thing her mother might desire. The first thing was to make inquiries as to the necessary time for leaving; and as she crossed the yard to reach the *bureau* for this purpose, with Maxwell

by her side, more than one pair of eyes were turned in wondrous admiration at her beauty, which was somewhat heightened by a slight colour which the cold clear air had produced.

Foreigners, as a rule, show better taste in their manner of gazing at a woman whose beauty attracts them than Englishmen; they seem—and if merely assumed, better that than to show no sign of it—to mingle respect with admiration, and not merely stare as if she were a statue or a picture, and devoid of all feelings that could be pained by such objectionable attentions.

As Dacia passed a group of men—military, apparently—their hats were raised and their heads bent, as if a queen, not of beauty only, but of royal rank, was the object of their courteousness; and Dacia's proud stately bow in return told them what her native country was, even if there had not been proof of her English birth in every step she made. It is the fashion to say that a French woman's walk is far superior to that of our own countrywomen. It may be to those who think that a ship when rolling is more graceful than when she sails steadily along; for there is precisely that dif-

ference between the French and English women's walk. The former rolls from side to side, putting her shoulder forward with her foot, which makes short quick steps; whilst the latter walks with a steady, even movement.

The information gained, and the final arrangements made, there remained nothing further to do till the moment for starting arrived. Miss Singleton proposed that they should take a little turn; but Mrs. Singleton seemed to think she would have turns enough, one way or another, before she reached the end of her journey, without any self-inflicted; so she declined, but told her daughter she might go if she liked; and as Dacia thought any thing better than sitting in that dreary room with its sand-covered floor, she and Maxwell wandered out. In a few minutes they found themselves ascending the slope up to the old ramparts; and desolate and forlorn as they have of late years become, there is yet a ruined beauty about them rendering them interesting to strangers, still more so to one who had seen so little beyond the precincts of her old country home as Dacia Singleton. She could have lingered on, gazing at the broad,

open sea, and the sand-hills that stretch far along the coast, but that she knew her mother would fidget and worry if she was not back in ample time.

As they were walking with somewhat hurried steps towards the "Flandre," Miss Singleton's eyes were arrested by the strange figure of a clergyman—a Protestant clergyman—with his surplice on, walking rapidly down the Rue Royale, the white garment floating in the breeze behind him.

"What an extraordinary figure!" said Dacia.

"That's the English parson from Dunkerque," said Maxwell. "The people at the hotel told me he went there this morning just after he arrived."

"O!" was Dacia's only reply, not feeling the slightest interest in the man on account of his connection with Dunkerque. Could she have seen into the future, could she have known the power that man was to exercise over her, could she have guessed at one-third of the torture he would mercilessly inflict on her, she would have prayed that her young life might be taken before such sorrow could accrue.

The second performance of an unpleasant deed

is by no means so difficult to endure as the first. Probably for this reason Mrs. Singleton arrived at the terminus without declaring that her bones had all been rattled together, or that she was incapable of getting out of the omnibus without being lifted. There was the usual confusion and bustle attending their departure as attends all railway journeys, especially on the Continent. There appear loads of official people, but not one pair of hands willing to lend themselves to help the parcel-laden travellers with their property into a carriage.

Mrs. Singleton had the greatest horror—one somewhat inherent in an Englishwoman—of being touched. Were a duke to have laid his hand on her, she would, like a greater lady of our land than herself, have drawn up her stately head and told him “his grace forgot himself.” But for a railway-porter, or station-master, or whatever the creature might call himself, to lay his coarse hand on her crape sleeve and desire her to make haste, was more than her temper or her sensitiveness could endure. Her pale thin cheeks flushed, and her eyes sparkled with anger, as, turning round, she exclaimed in English,

“How dare you insult me! How dare you touch me!”

“*Est-ce qu'elle est folle cette dame! Qu'est qu'elle veut donc?*” was all the redress she obtained in words from the man of dirt.

“*Non; je suis femme, je ne suis pas folle!*” was her indignant reply.

At this moment Monsieur Robert made his appearance, and in civil terms and good English helped to smooth down Mrs. Singleton's ire, and at last got them into the carriage, offering to do any thing required; and, in short, was as polite and obliging as Monsieur Robert always is to all who pass through Calais.

How Mrs. Singleton ascended that tremendously steep step, she never knew; the first thing she became conscious of was, that she was seated next to a huge colossal figure that was undraping itself of a white garment.

“It's no use, ma'am, to talk to those people. English, ma'am, I conclude? Yes, of course. Well, then, if you're about to make a long journey of it, take my advice and put up with their ways. I used to kick against their *liberté, égalité*,

and *fraternite* at first, but it was pure loss of time. Empire or no empire, the corduroy class stick to it, and will stick to it as long as the corduroy sticks to them."

During this speech the gigantic figure continued the process of disrobing, till the surplice was off. Then he rolled it up in a manner that would have made his wife or his housekeeper, if he possessed either of these men-necessities, scream out at his want of thought. Certainly it never could go on his broad shoulders again until an iron had smoothed out the great big wrinkles he must have occasioned.

"I am not going to make a long journey," replied Mrs. Singleton, more politely than she would have done to a stranger who had so addressed her in her own country. But even the few hours she had passed in Calais had rendered her peculiarly alive to the superiority, in her idea at least, of the English over the French, to say nothing of her delight in meeting an Englishman at all, though she knew full well that she would find Dunkerque a very hot-bed of them. "My daughter and I are going to pass the winter at Dunkerque."

“God bless my soul! Dunkerque? Then you are Mrs. Singleton—and you Miss Singleton,” he added, turning slightly round towards Dacia: but the moment his eye fell on her face, he started in surprise; merely, however, at finding such a lovely fair face so near to him, and that he had not instantly discovered it.

“I am Mrs. Singleton, and that is my daughter,” she replied, with a little touch of haughtiness in her tone. She did not understand how that monster man could tell who she was.

“I am the British chaplain at Dunkerque,” said the parson, wishing to explain his reason for being able to guess who his travelling companions were, and at the same time desiring to ingratiate himself into their good books—a feat he did not perform over successfully with the majority of the residents at Dunkerque. “I am going back now. I was sent for here to christen the child of a friend of mine; so I took a return-ticket, and left home at five this morning.”

Immediately that Miss Singleton had set eyes on the white gown, she recognised the owner as the walking leviathan of the Rue Royale, and

consequently, through Maxwell's information, as the man who would have in his keeping the care of the English Protestant souls at Dunkerque; therefore his own introduction was no news to her. She did not feel prepossessed either with his appearance or manner. They certainly were not calculated to strike the fancy of a young and high-bred girl with any thing pleasant.

"You must be very anxious to get back, that you started so early," said Mrs. Singleton—more as a remark to herself than a question to the parson; for the recollections of the previous morning's misery were still too vivid for her to contemplate the idea of early rising with any thing but downright horror.

"Our Consul's ill, and I expect he'll be wanting to have a talk with me if he gets worse, and I shouldn't like to be away. You see, Mrs. Singleton, clergymen are wanted at births and deaths pretty well as much as the doctor. Here have I been making a Christian of that squalling brat that came into the world two days ago, and I shall have to try and make a Christian of our Consul before he leaves it. That'll be harder work for me, I

fancy," he said, with a loud but short laugh. "I expect it's all up with him."

"Do you mean he is dangerously ill?" asked Mrs. Singleton, fighting against her growing dislike to the British parson, that she might learn a little of the local news concerning the place that was to be her future home.

"Very bad state indeed—very. Lefèvre said he couldn't last if the symptoms didn't alter before night."

"Lefèvre is the French doctor, I suppose?"

"Yes; a clever fellow enough, I believe; but I like an Englishman if there's any thing bad at work. I don't think those French fellows understand our John Bull constitution."

"But has the Consul not English advice as well?"

"Bless you, he can't afford to send for an English doctor from Paris or Brussels, and there are none worth having any nearer. You know we have none at all at Dunkerque, good, bad, or indifferent."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Singleton, in unfeigned dismay. "No English doctor! Do

you hear that, Dacia? What shall I do? I could never live in a place where there was not an English doctor, and a clever one too."

Dacia had listened to all the conversation that had passed, but in no way joined in it. She could never bring herself to speak or show unnecessary civility to any one for whom she entertained a feeling of dislike, whether of recent or ancient acquaintanceship. She never understood the use of it; consequently she never gave herself the trouble to attempt it. Every moment she felt her growing dislike to the British parson increase rapidly; therefore, with her head leaning back and her eyes closed, she was resolving within herself that nothing should ever induce her to be on otherwise than bowing terms with that huge man. Now that her mother addressed her, she was obliged to speak, but she merely said:

"I daresay, mamma, you will find the doctors that are there clever enough;" and then resolutely closed her great blue eyes again, causing her eyelashes to look like a deep silken fringe overshadowing her cheeks.

"You should never have fixed on a small

continental town, ma'am, like Dunkerque to live in, if you can't do without an English medical man. And if we had one, I don't think we should care much for him; you see, it's only those that are worth nothing who leave their own country. If they are clever, they find plenty to do at home; if they are fools, they come over here; but we are better without *them*."

Dacia thought the same argument might apply to clergymen. If they are good men, they do not seek to leave England; but if they happen to have a blot on their escutcheon you find them located in out-of-the-way continental towns. She was perhaps a little hard on them as a body, but in the main she was not far wrong. Poverty alone rarely causes a clergyman to leave his own land, or health either; but they are both convenient reasons to assign.

Mrs. Singleton was far too much occupied with thoughts of what would become of her in a place where she should have no doctor to drop in two or three times a week and sympathise with her ailments, real or imaginary, to continue the conversation; so the Reverend John Way had

to relapse for a time into silence—a proceeding to which he entertained a natural antipathy. But their reaching Hazebrouck was a break for him. There they had to change carriages; and Mr. Way gathered up the two ladies' various packages in his long powerful arms as if he were carrying a few nuts instead of a couple of tolerably heavy dressing-cases, a travelling-desk, two cloaks, a railway-wrapper, and a bundle of umbrellas and parasols; to say nothing of his own bag, containing his surplice, and what besides he himself only knew; but it gave one the idea, by the numerous round bulges that were shadowed out on it, that he had been investing in apples with proportions equalling his own.

Maxwell was very nearly left to go on with the train to Paris; but, thanks to Miss Singleton's thought and Mr. Way's great active strides, she was dragged forth from the second-class carriage she was seated in just as the train began to move. If an English maid can be more useless and troublesome at one time more than another, it is when travelling abroad.

“ We've a couple of hours before us here; the

train doesn't come in that picks us up till three o'clock," said Mr. Way.

"Two hours in a place like this, and with such a man, will be unbearable," thought Dacia; and she looked round in the vain hope of finding a book-stall; but the station at Hazebrouck then was not what it is now, and nothing met her eyes, turn which way she would, but the huge parson, who seemed intent on making converse.

"Have you lived all your life in London?" inquired Mr. Way in as quiet a tone as he could; but his voice was naturally big and loud, like himself. "You'll find a vast difference at Dunkerque if you have; it's an awfully slow place!"

"I have never lived in London," she replied coldly, and walking off instantly to the opposite end of the platform, where Maxwell was standing, like a solitary tall rock, amidst a sea of boxes.

Mrs. Singleton was sitting on a hard, greasy, yellow-painted bench outside the door of the "buffet," looking any thing but happy, and in the act of drawing her scent-bottle out from the depths of a small travelling-bag.

“Dacia, I wish you would look about and see if there is not a ladies’ room in which I could lie down for an hour. Did you ever see such an outlandish place to be detained at?”

“It is dreary,” replied her daughter; “but it would be better, mamma, if that horrid man were not with us; he looks more fit for a prize-fighter than—” Here the parson came up. “I’ll look for a room,” said Dacia, moving off.

“A room do you want? O, there’s one in here. Look, Miss Singleton—let me show you.”

“Thank you—I daresay I can find it; I won’t trouble you.”

However, trouble or no trouble, the parson continued his unappreciated attentions to mother and daughter—to say nothing of the share for which Maxwell came in—whether they wanted them or did not want them, till they reached Dunkerque, where, fortunately for them, they were delivered from his overpowering person and civilities by his finding the Percivals waiting for them at the station; and the Percivals and the parson agreed no better than fire and water.

A warm greeting took place between Mrs.

Singleton and Mrs. Percival; Dacia came in for her share of welcome, but chiefly as her mother's daughter, not on her own account, for they had never met before.

"I hardly expected you; but we walked down on chance. Yesterday George came twice. Did any thing happen to delay you?" And with such questions and explanatory replies did they pass the interval between their leaving the station and reaching the Hotel du Chapeau Rouge, where, for a day or two at least, it was arranged the Singletons were to put up.

A quaint old-fashioned house is the Chapeau Rouge; something like a posting-house inn of old England in days of yore, so not likely to suit the fastidious taste of Mrs. Singleton.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEW HOME.

A WHOLE week of unmitigated misery did the Singletons pass at the hotel. Mrs. Singleton, because she would not allow any thing or any one to be right in any matter they good-naturedly undertook to see or do for her; and Dacia, because of the humour her mother indulged herself in.

The day following their arrival—Sunday—Mrs. Singleton remained in her bed till the evening, and then only getting up for her dinner, of which she ate exceedingly well, but grumbled at it as much as if it had been uneatable. Dacia was not allowed to move out of the house, and Maxwell hardly out of her mistress's bedroom. She maintained she was very ill; and the knowledge of there being no English doctor at hand did make her nervous; of that there was no doubt;

but beyond that point which was real, she had nothing wrong with her but her temper. Mrs. Percival, a pretty, gentle, kind woman, whom Mrs. Singleton had known in her girlhood, came and sat by her, and chatted her into temporary quietude; but the moment she left, she was as bad as ever. It was always her head she fixed on as the seat of her ailment—when nothing really was amiss—for then she could with apparent reason complain if the slightest noise were made, and accuse her daughter or her maid of heartless indifference to her state.

“I wonder what Cis is doing,” she said, her eyes wandering languidly round the — by comparison with English bedrooms, but not otherwise —comfortless-looking apartment.

“I suppose they have just done dinner, and are thinking about tea,” replied Miss Singleton, whose patience had been sorely tried all day, and at last had arrived at that point which made her feel neither amiable towards others nor herself; so she answered somewhat abruptly; also fearing, if once her mother got on the subject of Cecily, she might draw the usual comparisons she in-

variably did between her two daughters, and so not improve her present sensations of irritability; she added, "I am very sleepy and heavy, mamma; I think I will go to bed."

"You are sleepy, then, from doing nothing; however, go if you are inclined. I have no right to expect you would devote half an hour to me."

"Why, I have devoted the whole day to you," said Dacia; and then, fearing to trust herself further, she kissed Mrs. Singleton—who turned her cheek towards her for that purpose—and went off to her own room, which was adjoining, though, fortunately for her, not communicating with her mother's.

The next day and the day after were slight improvements on the unlucky Sunday, for they were chiefly spent out of doors; but even the amusement Dacia might have derived from watching the strange manners and customs of a people that to familiar eyes have nothing noticeable in them, but to one who has never before been on foreign ground are peculiarly eccentric and novel, was denied her, from the unpleasant feeling she

had about the way her mother was dragging Mrs. Percival from house to house, as if that lady were in Dunkerque wholly and solely to be made use of, and act as house-agentess on the occasion.

However, by the Wednesday, apartments, the most suitable that had been seen, were secured ; but it was impossible for them to be ready till the Friday, and on a Friday Mrs. Singleton vowed nothing should induce her to take possession. She had left London on a Friday ; and though no calamity had ensued, she declared she had suffered and gone through so much, that she would not run the risk of any further annoyance by taking another important step on such a luckless day. Therefore it was not till Saturday that they took up their abode in a suite of rooms on the first floor of a tolerably-sized house in the Rue de l'Eglise, number 42.

The Rue de l'Eglise is a wide street leading from the Grand Place, or Place Jean Bart, down to the port. A street of shops ; but it was none the worse for that. The rooms were well enough when once you were in them ; but a long, narrow,

dark stone passage had to be gone through before you reached the staircase, which, though tolerably wide, was carpetless, and equally dark as the passage. On ascending, you came to a broad, open landing; a door on the left led to the kitchen; but continuing straight on, passing through an ante-room, the drawing-room was reached. It was a long narrow room; this arose from the room adjoining, which was the dining-room, having once formed a part of it. The drawing-room was furnished with all the pretty comfortless articles the French are so fond of amassing together in their *salons*. A dark-green velvet-covered sofa, with white and gold—a little faded—woodwork around it, was pleasing enough to the eye, but utterly useless as a thing to rest on; chairs to match, in every sense, for they made the back ache to sit on them for any length of time. A table at one end of the room, with a gorgeous Turkish-patterned cover over it; the window-curtains being of the same material and design. Several looking-glasses, a couple of small gilt tables with marble tops; a green-velvet-covered knife-board on the chimney-piece, studded round with brass

sugar-loaf shaped nails, such as are used for ornamenting a coffin; on it stood that one inseparable and useful ornament, supplied in every room on the Continent—a clock, white marble and ormolu, and branch candlesticks to correspond; a polished floor, with a strip of carpet, answering to what we should call a rug, in front of the fire-place, which was for burning wood only; a couple of green-velvet footstools;—and you have before you—if you imagine the paper on the walls to be white—the room that struck Mrs. Singleton's fancy so much at first sight, that she resolved to conclude the matter of hiring the apartments, without looking further.

But you may as well do at once what Mrs. Singleton allowed Mrs. Percival and her daughter do without her; that is, see the rest of the rooms, and then have done with it.

The dining-room, which we have seen adjoined the drawing-room, but did not communicate, contained a deal table, painted to look something like red mahogany, long and large, filling up the room more than was necessary or convenient. A movable cupboard of the same wood, with

shelves inside, and one deep drawer at the bottom—it looked more suited to a bed-room; eight straw-bottomed chairs; the floor painted the same as the table; gray-papered walls, with a large hideous print of Louis Philippe, and another of his good queen Amélie, hanging up;—and there is the dining-room as it was then, and perhaps as it still is.

The bed-rooms were on the same floor, at the back of the house; but there was such an extent of space in the way of landings, that it seemed almost like a separate house. Ground-rent, one would think, was not very high at Dunkerque, by the reckless manner they squander room. Two good-sized apartments, however, were reached at last, communicating one with the other in such a manner that the farthest one could only be reached through the first, or else by going right away back to where one came to the end of the stone passage leading from the entrance-door to the staircase, and by groping one's way up another flight, darker and drearier still—which, if not quite so long, seemed longer from its dismalness—and then another, narrower and steeper, at

the immediate top of which was the door opening into this second bed-room. It was the largest room of the two, and perhaps a little better furnished; but there was nothing to complain of on this head in either of the rooms.

Mrs. Singleton, of course, appropriated this one to herself; one reason being, it was up these back stairs on the floor above Maxwell's room was situated, and so far, therefore, it was convenient; another cause for her choice was its being the best room; and the last, that she, of course, could pass through her daughter's whenever it suited her, but it never would have done for her daughter to have made hers a passage-room.

Dacia was perfectly satisfied; she was so very glad to be in any place that was tolerably nice-looking, and that appeared to please her mother, that it is doubtful whether she would have demurred at any arrangement that could have been suggested. And if any thought crossed her mind of the difference between the home she had hitherto had and her present one, no word was uttered in regret, and no look betrayed what she might feel.

The rent was to be one hundred francs a

month, which appeared to Mrs. Singleton what she termed ridiculously cheap. She was, for a short time, something like a child with a new toy; she was pleased with every thing — pulling the furniture about, having it removed from one place to another, and then put back again to the original spot. But once the novelty over — and it lasted little over a week—the old story began; the smelling-bottle was in constant requisition, her head was always bad, the light affected her eyes, the noise of the great lumbering vehicles that occasionally passed, the rattling of that horrid omnibus that went to and fro from the Place to the beach from morning till night, were sore trials to her delicate nerves.

Then the servant, her Flemish cook and housemaid—in England called a servant-of-all-work—was for ever being guilty of some piece of stupidity, that caused Babette many a time and oft to suffer from her mistress's displeasure.

She was a young, pretty-looking woman, with a slight cast in her eye, which, however, in no way deteriorated from her good looks, but, on the contrary, gave her an arch expression no way dis-

agreeable. She could not understand the art of roasting; and had she been born and bred in England, and roasting all her life, her knowledge would have been of no avail, as the necessary kind of fireplace for such a purpose did not exist in all Dunkerque. But sometimes Mrs. Singleton took it into her head that nothing was wholesome but plainly roasted meat; and not getting it, she declared what she did get she could not digest. Then came the terrible thought that there was no English doctor; and to add to her trouble on this score, she unluckily heard from the gossip of the town, Miss Chorley—known by the *sobriquet* of Chattering Chorley—that M. Lefèvre was a retired army surgeon, and had served in various campaigns under the great Napoleon.

“The idea of a military doctor having any notion of what is necessary for a woman! Why, he can only be fit to attend a hospital where nothing but accidents are taken in. I am sure I do not know what will become of me. Remember, if I die, Dacia, I will not be buried in this horrible country. Your sister must bear the expense that would attend such an event.”

And after the delivery of some such remark, to which Dacia always made a soothing reply when her temper had not been over-taxed, Mrs. Singleton would close her eyes and inhale her salts, till some visitor or other occurrence took place to interrupt her monotonous dulness.

Dacia Singleton was but mortal, and had her faults and failings, like the rest of us. At the period of her father's illness and death, and for some months subsequent to it, she had borne with her mother's tiresome ways patiently and kindly; but her capabilities of endurance were gradually wearing away from being over-taxed. She frequently let Mrs. Singleton talk on without taking any notice of what she said; or perhaps, what was worse still, she made some reply not at all calculated to improve her groaning, complaining temper.

But notwithstanding the incessant worrying she was subject to at home, Dacia was by no means unhappy. She was still too young to set much value on the luxuries that wealth alone can give, and that she now for the first time found herself without; but the recollection of the past,

still so recent, often made her pause when about to give one of her hasty answers to her mother ; for she was certain, whatever she herself did, that her mother must feel their loss severely.

It was a cold dismal afternoon, towards the latter end of October. Mrs. Singleton was sitting in a *prie-dieu* chair before the fire ; her daughter was by the window, before a large piece of framed embroidery, which she was puzzling her head over. There was a mistake somewhere, which caused the lion's eye to appear in such a position that it gave him a very knowing look—a kind of squint. She was working James Moncrieffe's arms for a fire-screen. She had counted the stitches twenty times at least, from fore-paw to ear, but in vain ; she could not make out where the error lay.

“ Dacia, give me the second volume of this book. Here is the first, if you want it. It is very stupid, but perhaps you will not find it so.”

“ Three yellow, two silk, five—no ; two, three, four, five—yes, five of the next shade——”

“ Dacia.”

“ One moment, mamma. I think I see where it is now.”

“Why, it’s on the table, child.”

“How tiresome of you, mamma! You have made me lose the point I was counting from. I shall have to begin all over again. I wish the horrid thing were finished, or that I had never begun it. What is it you asked me for?”

“You pay no more attention to what I say than if I never spoke at all. I asked you for the second volume of this book; but I can get it myself.”

Mrs. Singleton made a semblance of moving, but Dacia was up in a moment, and handed her mother the book she had asked for.

“That work has put me out of patience, mamma dear. I was not purposely inattentive to you. Won’t you have the stool for your feet?” she added, pushing the footstool within reach. “You can hardly see to read now, can you?”

“If you can see to work on that fine canvas, I surely may be able to read good-sized print. I can see as well as most people, if I am not so young as I used to be. Who is that?”

CHAPTER IX.

MISS CHORLEY.

MRS. SINGLETON heard the approach of footsteps. A moment after, Babette appeared, and announced Miss Chorley, who followed close behind, walking with short quick little steps.

Miss Chorley was a maiden lady, who was cheerily going on to meet the twilight of life. She must have been five-and-forty, if she was a day. She was small in stature, and not great in mind; but she made up for both in heart, which, when you knew her, seemed too big for this world. Her face (a little round face—so like a cat's, though there was nothing cat-like in her nature) always wore a smile. She smiled at every thing; she smiled at every body. Nothing yet had ever been known to startle her into aught beyond a smile—not a benignant smile, but a cheery merry smile. This had been so during her fifteen years'

residence at Dunkerque; but what happened before that no one knew. One felt impressed, on first becoming acquainted with her, that either she had no heart at all, or that she had never known sorrow: which impression was as incorrect as many impressions are.

She was a good little soul, and, though known as Chattering Chorley, when she retailed scandal she smiled out the words; they were not spitefully spoken. I do not think she would wittingly, and assuredly never willingly, have pained the feelings even of her greatest antipathy; and she entertained, to the uttermost extent of what she could feel, an aversion to the Rev. John Way, but she rarely spoke ill-naturedly of him.

It was this little individual who came in opportunely, and disturbed the not over-pleasant *tête-à-tête* between Mrs. and Miss Singleton.

“Ah, how do you do, my dear Mrs. Singleton?—and how are you, Miss Dacia, this dull day?”

Miss Chorley, after receiving the ordinary replies to such ordinary questions, seated herself on the sofa, which was about the most uncomfortable seat in the room for Miss Chorley, her legs

being too short to touch the ground; but then the sofa was so placed that when she was on it her back was to the light; and she, like most other women who have well got over their *première jeunesse*, was quite alive to the fact that the broad glare of light that falls full on the face when opposite a window is not becoming. If you will notice women who have passed the rough corner of forty, you will see how careful they are to avoid daylight: not that Miss Chorley admitted herself to be any thing like that age. I think she hardly believed herself more than three or four-and-thirty; so often had she asserted it, that she now seemed to accept it as a truth.

It is very singular the effect produced on one's individual credulity—even against certain positive knowledge—if one systematically, for any length of period, steadily persists in an opposite statement. It certainly does in time obliterate the truth from one's memory, or if not entirely, quite sufficiently for one's conscience to take it easily. In the case of a lady's age, it does not much matter how old she calls herself; whether true or false, she is never believed.

"I have come to ask you to sign a petition, Mrs. Singleton."

Will the reader kindly bear in mind that Miss Chorley is always smiling: if this is done, it will save an infinity of trouble, as it will be unnecessary to repeat the fact every time she speaks.

"A petition!" said Dacia; "for what, and to whom, Miss Chorley?"

"If you will have patience, I daresay you will hear," said Mrs. Singleton.

"A petition for a consul, my dear Miss Singleton. You see, since poor dear Mr. Sar's death, which took place now I don't know how many weeks ago, no one has been nominated in his place; and it's very dull without a consul; so all the English residents are signing a petition that we may not only have a consul sent here immediately, but also that a Mr. Ivor Campbell may be appointed; and when it is all signed and prepared, dear old Mr. Butler intends sending it over to his son, that he may forward it to the Foreign Office. Isn't Ivor Campbell a romantic name, Miss Dacia? I think it delicious. You will sign it of course, Mrs. Singleton?"

“If my name is really necessary, I shall not like to refuse,” said Mrs. Singleton, in a tone which implied that she considered her name worth a good deal, and that she hoped others would do the same; for she added, “the name of Singleton is so well known in England that I should not like to append my signature to any paper that might come before my friends there, unless quite assured it was for the appointment of a proper and fitting person.”

Miss Chorley was quite the wrong kind of woman for Mrs. Singleton to expend her grand ideas on, they were all lost on her; she only smiled out an “Of course, of course,” and laid the paper, which contained a humble petition to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, &c. &c. &c., from the loyal and devoted subjects of her most gracious Majesty residing at Dunkerque, &c. &c. &c., that Mr. Ivor Campbell might be appointed, and so forth.

“The list is headed by that gigantic monster of a parson,” said Miss Chorley, in a tone that would not have left any one with the impression that she hated the man as much as her kind heart could hate, for she smiled it out as usual, and con-

tinued, "You see, the clergyman here is supposed to take precedence of every one; but *I* think Mr. Butler should,—Mr. Butler, who has been a resident here for upwards of twenty years, and such a dear, dear, good old man. If Mr. Butler left Dunkerque, I am sure I should; I don't think Dunkerque would be Dunkerque without him."

"I should be jealous of you, Miss Chorley, if I were Mrs. Butler," said Dacia, laughing.

"O no, Miss Dacia, you would not. Besides," she added with her usual smile, as if the thing was a capital joke instead of a terrible affliction, "you know she's blind."

Miss Singleton felt inclined to say that she thought that was an extra reason why the poor old lady might be jealous, for surely no man, even as old as Mr. Butler (this was merely Dacia's idea), would be likely to fall in love with Chattering Chorley; but then if Mrs. Butler could not see, she might imagine her as attractive as she was obliging and good-natured.

"Mrs. Sars, I hear, is left with her large family without a shilling," said Miss Chorley. "It is very sad; I wonder what she will do?"

"Surely she will receive a pension?" said Mrs. Singleton.

"Nothing of the kind. There is no pension for consuls' widows. It is a great shame, I think; especially when they have children. How can she support eight children on nothing? Why, the thing is impossible. Mr. Butler gave her a handsome present before she left, dear good man; he only lives to do kind things. I don't think consuls have any right to marry unless they have private fortunes. But I must be running away, Mrs. Singleton; so will you please sign this?" and she held up her petition.

"O yes, if you assure me that this Mr. Ivor Campbell is a gentleman."

"I hear he is the most fascinating creature in the world; all the young ladies will fall in love with him directly, he is so charming, though we have not a great many here to do so; and those that there are, you have put quite in the shade, Miss Singleton. We used to think Léonie Hervieu a beauty till you came. Do you know the name that has been given you?"

"No," she replied a little curtly, and blushing.

She had the greatest dislike to hear her beauty spoken of in that abrupt matter-of-fact sort of way; she was as pleased as any other girl would be when admiration reached her in a legitimate manner, but not otherwise. Had she never known before that she possessed no ordinary share of nature's best gift to a woman, she could not long have remained ignorant of it at Dunkerque; for hardly a day passed without something occurring to force the knowledge on her.

"The Rose of Dunkerque! Isn't it a pretty idea. But I won't tell you who first called you so, for fear, you know, of consequences." Miss Chorley's face perfectly beamed.

"I am not curious," replied Dacia, with an indifference Miss Chorley could not the least understand. "But never mind talking about me, Miss Chorley. Tell me, is the ball ever likely to come off that I have heard spoken of ever since I came here?"

"I am sure, Dacia, I don't know that you can care about there being a ball or not, for I do not see how you could go."

Dacia gave a look of dismay at her mother.

"You forget my state of health; I am not fit to go to a ball; I should catch my death of cold if I attempted such a piece of folly; besides the deep mourning I am still wearing."

"But, mamma, surely you would try and go? your being in mourning would not signify; and if you wrapped up well, I don't think it would hurt you. I should so like to go to a French ball."

"Well, well, there is plenty of time to think about it, when the ball is decided on actually being given."

"You know, Miss Dacia, the ball was intended to be given in honour of our new consul; but as no consul has come, I think it ought to be given just the same, to prevent the young people being disappointed."

"Yes, and give another when the consul does come," suggested Dacia.

"A capital idea, Miss Singleton—capital; I will tell the ladies of the committee what you say."

"I hope, Miss Chorley, you will do no such thing, for—"

Mrs. Singleton was interrupted in what she might have been about to say by the stentorian

voice of Mr. Way, who came in just at that moment, accompanied by Mr. Butler, exclaiming,

“Ha! we’ve caught you, ladies; at it as usual. Gossip and slander, eh?”

Mrs. Singleton gave her thin delicate hand to Mr. Way, who proffered his huge fist; but Miss Singleton chose to be as blind on the occasion as poor Mrs. Butler was, and saluted him with a haughty bow. To Mr. Butler, however, she gave her pretty little hand, and a sweet smile of welcome. Many would have envied him that smile.

Mr. Butler was Mrs. Percival’s father, and so, to a certain extent, was no stranger to the Singletons, though personally he had remained unknown to them till they went to reside at Dunkerque. He was a frequent visitor in the Rue de l’Eglise now. Mrs. Singleton liked him exceedingly; he was about the only person in the whole town she did like; and she could make herself pleasant enough when it suited her, and doubly so if she could commence by telling all her grievances; for having once let her tongue have full play on the subject, she gradually dropped it, and became an agreeable companion. Mr. Butler had had enough tact to

find this out, and allowed himself to be treated as she had always treated her medical adviser; he willingly paid the penalty of listening and sympathising with all her troubles, to be afterwards entertained by sensible conversation—an article not easily procured in Dunkerque.

He had met Mr. Way *en route*; and Mr. Way having an instinctive feeling that the Singletons liked him no better than the rest of the English residents, was glad of an opportunity to pay them a visit with Mr. Butler instead of alone. However, he did not remain long; he found it neither amusing nor pleasant; and when he rose to leave there was no symptom of regret on any one's face.

“You look as merry as ever, Miss Chorley,” he said, as he bid that lady good-bye.

“O yes, Mr. Way; I have nothing weighing on me much.”

“The time will come, the time will come; you're like a young bear, with all your troubles before you.”

Miss Chorley liked to be compared to young people—human people. I don't know, though, that she relished being likened to a bear; how-

ever, she smiled over it all the same; but she expressed her great delight when Mr. Way was gone.

“And I think I’ll go too now, as you have come, Mr. Butler, or Miss Singleton will declare it was an assignation. I will go and see Mrs. Butler. I am sure to find her at home, am I not?”

“Ah, do, Miss Chorley; you will find her in her old arm-chair, and glad to see you. You’re a great favourite of hers, you know,” replied the old man.

“So, if you cannot enjoy the broad sunshine,” said Dacia laughingly, “you will go where the effect of its brightness still lingers.”

“O, you wicked girl!” said Miss Chorley, holding up her finger and shaking it menacingly at Dacia; “some day I shall pay you off for this.” And off the little smiling lady trotted.

“A good soul that, but not overburdened *here*,” said Mr. Butler, touching his forehead with his finger, and seating himself in front of the fire by Mrs. Singleton’s side, giving evident intentions of paying a long visit. So Dacia, glad to have

half an hour to herself, left her mother and visitor to their *tête-à-tête* talk.

As Dacia passed the door that opened into the kitchen, she heard a man's voice speaking in a somewhat angry tone. Without much thought she opened the door and looked in, more to remind Babette to be punctual with her mother's five-o'clock tea, which Dunkerque hours had not yet made her give up, than from any curiosity. It was hearing some one speaking that made her remember Babette's thoughtlessness on that head, for it flashed across her that some friend had dropped in and would probably chatter on, and the tea—a no unusual occurrence—be forgotten.

Her astonishment may be conceived when her eyes fell on the monster form of Mr. Way, one hand resting on Babette's shoulder, the other holding one of hers. His back was turned towards the door; but as there were never two backs like the parson's—at any rate, in Dunkerque—Dacia had no difficulty in instantly recognising him, even before the opening of the door had caused him to turn round.

“O mademoiselle,” cried Babette, “*monsieur*

le ministre only came to—to offer me a little good advice.”

She spoke in a confused and bewildered manner, and her face, which before was flushed, now became pale.

Dacia knew no wrong; but an instinctive repugnance she felt towards the parson gave her a notion that he could know no right.

“Babette and I have long been at religious enmity,” said Mr. Way in a jocose tone, but evidently put on. He was clearly not at his ease. “And I was just making an attempt to try and bring her to see the error of her ways. You know we Protestants are supposed to be lukewarm in making converts; now I want to wipe out that stain that has been thrown upon us.”

Dacia’s tall figure was drawn up to its full height, and her face but gained in beauty from the angry colour that mounted to her cheeks as she replied, “Religion that only produces enmity can be of little worth. If you are endeavouring to change Babette’s belief, I think your manner of trying is not calculated to bring success. This is neither a fitting time nor place for such a purpose.”

Dacia thought any familiarity between a man holding the position of a gentleman—more especially that of a clergyman—and a servant, so opposite to all she considered gentlemanly, and so different to all she had ever witnessed amongst those she had been accustomed to associate with, that though she was not surprised—for she thought Mr. Way could be guilty of any objectionable act—from that moment her aversion to him became so great she could barely be civil to him.

When he left, which he did rather hurriedly and a little disconcerted, Miss Singleton told Babette very quietly that she did not think her mother would be pleased at what had happened. The poor girl then burst into tears, and entreated her young mistress not to tell Mrs. Singleton—not to tell any one. She promised in the most emphatic manner that Mr. Way should never, never go into the kitchen again; and so Dacia, to comfort her, gave the required promise. It might have been better for Babette had Dacia been more worldly-wise and less gentle-hearted. However, beyond the increased aversion it produced for the parson, the whole affair passed from her

mind after a little, and she thought no more of it, till it was recalled to her memory by subsequent events ; then it stood out in broad relief, and caused her much self-reproach for having so readily acceded to poor Babette's request.

CHAPTER X.

A DUNKERQUE SOIREE.

"MAMMA, were you in earnest the other day when you said, that if the ball that has been so much talked about takes place, you would not be able to go?" asked Miss Singleton of her mother one evening when they were sitting together alone.

Mrs. Singleton inhaled a good supply of ammonia from her bottle, closing her eyes each time she inhaled it, before she replied to her daughter's question, and then it was only a vague answer.

"I cannot understand, Dacia, what attraction you expect to find at a ball in such a place as this, that you desire so much to go. The class of people you would meet are all inferior to those you have been accustomed to associate with; then it will be a public ball—and public balls are not proper things for young ladies to go to, unless they

have a large party of their own friends that they can keep with."

It was a long speech for Mrs. Singleton, but it was not spoken uninterruptedly; the salts were several times in requisition, and the fan too once or twice, for the room had become insufferably hot: there was a fire large enough for the coldest winter day, and it was but a chilly autumn evening. However, Mrs. Singleton would have a roaring fire, and so there it was.

"But, mamma, it won't be like a public ball in England; we shall know every one who is there, and I should so much like to go. I was thinking, if you won't take me yourself, nor let me go with the Percivals, that we might ask Mum to come over; you know she did promise to come before Christmas. Wouldn't you be glad to see her dear good kind face, mamma?"

"Of course I should be very glad to see your aunt," said Mrs. Singleton, in a tone that made the "of course" excessively doubtful; "but it is impossible to ask her, for there is no room for her."

"Yes, mamma, there is," hastily replied Dacia.

"There is an empty room next to Maxwell's, and a very nice one. I could go up there, and let Mum have mine."

"That would not do. Mum could not have your room, for in that case I could not pass in and out of it. However, I will go up and see the room you speak of to-morrow. But as to the ball, if you are so anxious to go, I must go with you myself. It would not be proper for you to go with any one but your mother to such an entertainment."

Dacia, under the influence of an intense gratitude she instantly experienced at her mother's contemplated self-sacrifice, jumped up, and putting her arm round her neck, kissed her forehead.

"Take care, Dacia, you are crushing my collar," was the acknowledgment of the caress, spoken in a fretful tone, and pushing her daughter from her.

Dacia sat down again and sighed. How she longed to be loved by her mother, as she felt she could have loved her, had she only shown the slightest affection for her! Not that she did not feel any, but her manner was cold and repelling.

All Dacia's advances were met in the same way ; yet Mrs. Singleton could be demonstrative, and was so at times, but never with Dacia.

After a pause Mrs. Singleton moved her chair a little back from the fire—like a dog that had lain till he could endure the heat no longer, and then walked panting away. She took up a book, and began turning the leaves over to find her place.

“Is it not to-night the Hervieus asked us?” she inquired.

“Yes, I wish you had gone, mamma. I am sure you would like the place better if you would but go out a little ; it is pleasant enough.”

“It may be pleasant to you, but it is intolerable to me. Not any one in the place, unless it be the Percivals and Butlers, that can be called our equals ; a set of people who have left their own country either because they cannot afford to live in it, or because they have done something that debars them from remaining there.”

Dacia looked up. “Why then, mamma, they *are* our equals, at least the first you named ; for we are here because we cannot afford to live in

England, or, at least, not in the way we have been accustomed to."

"I think my own child might at all events spare me the humiliation of taunting me with my poverty," said Mrs. Singleton in a whining tone; a very different one to what she had spoken in when discussing other people's circumstances.

"Taunt you, mamma! O, how you misunderstand me!"

"Well, well, don't become sentimental. I cannot bear romantic people; and you are very much given, Dacia, to romance, though where you get it from, or who you take it after, I am sure I cannot tell; for neither your father nor I ever had a particle of it."

"The last thing in the world to accuse me of," said Dacia; "I hardly know what it means."

"Why, the ridiculous fancy you took at first sight to that tall, pale, sickly young man we met at Cecily's; that was romantic."

"You mean Mr. Marsden?"

"Of course I do; it was highly absurd of you."

"Poor man! I merely felt interested in him

because it struck me as sad, very sad, to see one so young in such health and suffering as he did."

"Nonsense ; sufferings ! What do you know of his sufferings ? What had he to suffer from ? It seems to me that you have more sympathy for other people's imaginary ailments than you have for my real ones. I am sure I do not know what will become of me if I do not get better soon ; I shall be driven to send for that man Lefèvre ; and I am sure if I do, he will kill me."

"Then I am sure, if I were you, I would not let him near me," said Dacia smiling. "But, mamma, you are looking very well ; you seem to me now better than you have been for some months."

"That shows how little you notice me, Dacia ; but it is only what I have met with through life—indifference to all I feel, and no sympathy for all I suffer. But it will end some day ; there is another and a better world, and there I shall be released from all ills, bodily and mental."

Such conversations were of daily occurrence between Mrs. Singleton and her daughter ; and it seemed as if nothing would improve matters. Since

they had been at Dunkerque, with the exception of dining once with the Percivals, they had refused every invitation. The Hervieus, the oldest and best of the resident French families in the place, declared they would ask them no more; but General Hervieu, a charming old man, who for forty years of his life had served his country faithfully and well, could not resist the charms of Miss Singleton, so he was resolute in declaring that whenever they had a *soirée*, the Singletons should receive an invitation. Thus for this evening they had again been asked, but, as usual, were not present.

"Well, General, the next time those proud English ladies are asked inside my house, the invitation shall go in your name alone," said Madame Hervieu to her husband.

"But I assure you," said Chattering Chorley, who formed one of the company, "Miss Singleton would have been delighted to have come; it is her mamma who is too delicate to go out, and so the poor girl is obliged to remain at home."

"Are you talking of La Rose de Dunkerque?" asked young Hervieu, a grandson of

the old people, and whose only sister resided with them, their father and mother having both died of a fever when they were children.

"To be sure we are," replied his grandfather; "I never saw such a lovely face as hers in all my life, and I have seen a great many."

"How can you talk such nonsense, grand-papa!" exclaimed Léonie Hervieu; "I can understand Hippolyte talking such stuff, but not you."

"Don't you know, my pretty Léonie, that there is no fool like an old one? And I don't agree with you about her being proud; she may look so, but she is not so, and that adds to her beauty."

"By Jove! she can be haughty enough if it suits her," put in big Mr. Way. He had a vivid recollection of her manner to him a few days back.

"Miss Singleton hates Mr. Way," said a very deaf old lady in a loud tone of voice, but believing herself to be speaking in a whisper to her neighbour.

There was an awkward silence for a minute, Mr. Way not having the *savoir faire* necessary to laugh off such an unpleasant remark; but Mr.

Butler broke it at last by asking Miss Chorley if she had obtained all the signatures to the petition.

“Every one that lives in the town whose name is worth having has signed,” replied Miss Chorley; “I will bring it round to you to-morrow morning, for it will be a good thing to have it sent off as soon as possible. I am sure we have been long enough without a consul.”

A tray was now brought in by a neatly-dressed woman servant, with glasses, a large bottle of water, three or four bottles of various sirups, some sugar, and a large prettily-ornamented cake. It looked like a round very thick sandwich, sugared over, and bits of currant-jelly in various spots to make it pleasant to the eye as well as the taste. Though the cheer was not inebriating, it certainly tended to dissipate the awkwardness that every one felt through the deaf old lady’s remark, and to increase the hilarity of the company; they grew more pleased with themselves, and consequently with each other.

Miss Chorley took the opportunity of venturing to utter the suggestion made by Dacia Singleton, that the long-talked-of ball should take place, not-

withstanding there being no consul to do honour to; and that when the great man arrived another should be given in celebration of the event.

The young portion of the community were entirely in favour of the move, but it was but feebly seconded by the elders; however, as General Hervieu, conjointly with Mr. Butler, were all-powerful in any matters connected with the town, and as both these old gentlemen were strong partisans of the Rose of Dunkerque, it seemed very probable she would have her wish gratified.

"I think we want something to brush us up a bit," said a fat, round-faced, middle-aged man, with a piece of red ribbon in his button-hole, who still considered himself one of the eligibles of the place, and held a situation in the Custom-house.

"Ah, Monsieur René, you think no such thing, as far as yourself is concerned," said Léonie Hervieu. "How can any one want brushing up, if they go to Paris twice every year!"

"*Mademoiselle me flatte,*" said Monsieur René, bowing low before her.

He was a great admirer of Léonie's, but she usually snubbed him. There was some one else

whose admiration Mademoiselle Hervieu preferred, a certain Lieutenant Dupouÿ ; but then the Lieutenant was not present. Besides which, she began to think all were fish that came to her net now ; so many had deserted her for the English beauty, that the French *belle* felt sadly aggrieved, and disliked Dacia Singleton accordingly.

There was not a man in Dunkerque who had not seen Miss Singleton, though very few had spoken to her, and every one exclaimed at her beauty, and spoke of her in enthusiastic terms. Those who did not know her were envious of those who did, and to gain a passing bow was to many sufficient to make them feel in good humour for the rest of the day.

What are but trifling occurrences and of no moment in great towns, form important events in little ones ; consequently the Singletons' arrival as intended residents created a stir amongst the inhabitants that they had not yet entirely recovered from ; indeed it seemed occasionally to revive instead of dying away. Miss Singleton's English mode of dress, so neat, so simple, and yet so pretty, became quite the fashion amongst all

the young French ladies ; though whilst they tried to imitate her, they never let the opportunity pass of saying something ill-natured and spiteful. So it was that, when Miss Chorley raised the ball-question, it was too good an occasion to let some shafts fly that certainly would wound, if wishes were facts.

The Merivales, the Thomases, and half-a-dozen others declared Mrs. Singleton to be unbearable with her fancies and whims, and Miss Singleton equally objectionable from her pride and conceit. However true the accusations against the mother might be, certainly those against her daughter were equally false, and loud protestations from the male portion of the company,—one great voice excepted—proclaimed them so.

“I think it will show the greatest facetiousness,” said Mrs. Thomas, “if we consent to a ball taking place just to please those people who think themselves too grand to come amongst us. If they can go to balls, they can attend our *soirées*.”

Mrs. Thomas was the daughter of a rich brewer, but the wife of a poor man ; and having a large family to educate, they migrated to Dun-

kerque till their children were old enough to have done with schooling. She was a sour-faced-looking woman, tall and large-boned, and had a strange love of using words that were long and hard like herself, with the additional peculiarity of misapplying them. She was perfectly ignorant of that part of the business; but her eldest daughter, knowing her failing, and perfectly aware of what the word should be, invariably sat by her to prompt her to the right one. But she no more heeded her than a train in motion would heed a goose flapping its wings on the roadside.

"Obsequiousness, mamma, obsequiousness!" whispered Miss Elizabeth Thomas, loud enough for several of the English ears to be attracted by the mistake, which by one or two at all events might have passed unnoticed; as the correction was by Mrs. Thomas.

"It will be a very bad president for the future," continued that lady, in order to show how little she heeded Miss Thomas.

"Precedent, mamma, precedent!" again put in the young lady.

And so they talked on, some against, but the majority for, the ball, till of course the majority was victorious; and by the time they began making a move to disperse, it was unanimously resolved one should be given early in the ensuing month, consul or no consul. Then the ladies put on their woollen head-coverings, their large thick shawls and waterproof overshoes, and were ready to walk home with their respective belongings.

Hippolyte Hervieu and Jean Beauregard lived together in lodgings in the Rue du Midi. To get there the two young men passed down the Rue de l'Eglise, which was totally unnecessary—indeed they were obliged to digress in order to do so; and when in front of the Singletons' house, they agreed on giving the "Rose" an impromptu serenade. They stood there singing with all the strength of their lungs what they thought very charming, but what Miss Singleton, who was sleeping calmly and soundly, was totally unconscious of; besides, had she been awake, it is doubtful if she would have heard any thing, being at the back of the house, and with thick walls, to boot, between

her and the street. In their folly they lingered some time hoping to see her, but to no purpose; so they went on their way, consoling themselves with cigars till they reached their own house.

CHAPTER XI.

MARKET-DAY.

A FEW days after the despatch of the petition requesting the appointment of Mr. Ivor Campbell to the consulship at Dunkerque, Mrs. Singleton received a long letter from her daughter, Mrs. Moncrieffe. It will be best to transcribe it, as it is tolerably concisely written, and it would be difficult to say which portion one could omit.

“Hertford-street, Mayfair,
November 24th.

“DEAREST MAMMA,—Only think how strange! I know your new Consul that is to be at Dunkerque. Mr. Marsden brought him here the other day, just as we had returned from Brighton, where we have been staying for a fortnight, to be near the Langens, whose house is still unfinished, and so are still there; but James would not stand Brighton any longer, and so we came

back; though I daresay I shall go down again, though James says I sha'n't. But I don't much care either way. If I want to go, of course I shall go; and if I don't, why I shall stay here. But to return to your Consul: he is a great friend of Henry Marsden's, who said, as he was appointed to Dunkerque, he thought I should like to know him, which of course I did; and we asked them both to dinner, and they came the other night.

“Well, he is very good-looking, tall, slight, with very black hair, and a great deal of it; dark-blue eyes, though they look light for his complexion; the most beautiful mouth and teeth; a large nose; whiskers, of course; quite young, for a man at least. I don't think he can be more than eight-and-twenty, and he sings beautifully; but he has the crossiest look possible. I am sure he is bad-tempered or unhappy; and you know one makes you the other, so I suppose he is both. I felt rather afraid of him, and was not sorry when they went, especially as he wouldn't sing. He said he had given it up these two years. I don't see the good of his having a voice, if he won't make use of it.

"I told him, of course, of you and Dacia being at Dunkerque; but then Mr. Marsden had told him all about that before. I am quite sure Henry Marsden is in love with Dacia; but you need not tell her so; it will only make her conceited, and he will never be able to marry her, for he is sure to die in the spring, if even he lives through the winter; at least, Mr. Reeves says so, and I am sure he must be right. Besides, he ought to have left England long ago.

"If you want any needles or pins, or any thing of that sort, let me know by return of post, because the Consul offered to take them over for me. He didn't say needles and pins of course, but that if I had any little parcel, he would take charge of it. I don't want to prejudice you against him, but I can't help thinking he must be dreadfully wanting in good taste. Just fancy; he has been several years at Genoa, and he has been trying and trying for two years to get some other town; and then he accepts the first he has had the chance of, which is Dunkerque. Why, Genoa was much superior in every way! The salary was much more than what he will have

now; though perhaps, as he has money of his own, he won't so much care for that. Then he had a magnificent house there; loads and loads of parties. And then the scenery and works of art that surrounded him! I can't understand it. He must be a misanthrope. However, you will soon be able to judge for yourselves. I am sorry for you, because a pleasant gay consul would have been so very nice.

"I have only seen Mum once since we came back to town. She is quite well. I asked her when she was going over to see you. She said she was afraid not just yet. You know Mum always has so much to do, though I am sure I don't know what she does, unless it is for other people; it is never any thing for herself.

"How are you? I hope you have not been obliged to send for the French doctor yet. Do you still dislike the place as much as ever? Is Dacia reconciled to it? I should think it very amusing to be where one felt one was the top person in the place. James says he knows one of Mrs. Thomas's sisters. She married a man in the Guards, who expected to get a fortune with

her, but found out, when too late, she would get nothing till after her father's death. Good-bye, dearest mamma. Love to Dacia.

"Your affectionate daughter,

"C. MONCRIEFFE."

"How very thoughtless Cis is!" said Mrs. Singleton, when she had finished the letter and handed it to Dacia, notwithstanding the caution in it about not telling her of Mr. Marsden's admiration. "She never gives the consul's name; but I suppose it is this Mr. Ivor Campbell."

Dacia made no reply; for she was reading the letter—reading it with an interest she rarely felt for her sister's productions. Her heart beat and her eyes brightened as they fell on the first portion of her remark about Henry Marsden; but a sinking, sickening feeling followed as she read the words that spoke of his death so speedily and so surely. Dacia pondered some moments over those few lines before she went on with the remainder of the letter. And yet she was not in love with Marsden, nor was it gratified vanity that called forth her feelings. She questioned herself closely

then and after, and she was convinced, whatever she felt, it was not love. She had never yet known what that was; but instinct told her this was not it. She could have heard without a pang that he was attached to any one else. She even thought such a knowledge would give her pleasure; yet she was fully aware of a strange interest in him.

"I suppose it is the Dunkerquois protégé," remarked Miss Singleton, as she returned the letter to her mother. "It is strange he should be a friend of Mr. Marsden's."

"I see nothing strange in it; but I suppose you will draw some romantic deductions from the fact, especially after what Cis says of the poor dying man. I forgot that when I gave you the letter to read."

"Pray, mamma, do not talk about my being romantic," said Dacia, looking vexed. "You know I am nothing of the kind, and I believe you only say so to annoy me."

"I am used to your impertinence, Dacia," said Mrs. Singleton, gathering a large plaid shawl around her and moving towards the door, "or I

might feel surprised at your speaking to me in that tone. I hope if ever you have children of your own, you will teach them what their duty is towards their mother, and that they may learn what respect is." And she closed the drawing-room door immediately after, giving Dacia no opportunity of replying, had she been so disposed.

"So, after all, the consul will be here for the ball," thought Miss Singleton, dismissing from her mind her mother's words as soon as they had been uttered. "I thought to have achieved a great triumph over those Merivales and Hervieux, and Thomases; but now they will crow over me that I have not succeeded in having a ball independently of the consul, who seems, by the way, to be any thing but an amiable or pleasant person, from Cecily's description. But I don't think Cis knows how to judge people's characters, whatever she may do their faces." And then she fell into a long train of thought, arising from the fact that the new consul was a friend of Mr. Marsden's, and wondering whether he would ever come over to Dunkerque in consequence.

It was still quite early, and Dacia was still alone when Mrs. Percival came in.

"Is your mamma not well, Dacia, that she is invisible this morning?" she said, having sat a few minutes, and Mrs. Singleton not appearing.

"As well as usual. She only left the room a little while ago. We have had a letter from my sister this morning, and mamma is never quite so contented after receiving letters from England."

"No bad news, though, I hope?"

"None; it contains chiefly an account, or rather description, of the new consul."

"What! *our* consul—the one that is to come here! Is one appointed?"

Miss Singleton could not yet understand the immense interest and curiosity such a circumstance gave rise to, as any one hearing from or seeing a person who was to fill so important a position as the English consul held amongst the English residents. But then she had not lived in Dunkerque all her life, or in any other provincial town, or she might have comprehended it better. She smiled at Mrs. Percival's eagerly-

spoken questions as she replied, "Yes, the one that is coming here."

"Is it, then, Mr. Ivor Campbell?"

"I suppose so; but Cecily does not give his name."

"When is he to arrive?"

"She says soon; but she did not mention day or date."

"I wonder what Chattering Chorley would give to know this! Don't you tell any one, Dacia. Chorley can't bear that any one should hear any news before she does. What fun it will be to tease her!"

"I would rather tease the Merivales and Thomases," replied Dacia, who had a special dislike to these two families. "They are such disagreeable people, I wish they would leave Dunkerque."

"There is no chance of that; they are too poor; but, after all, you don't see much of them. You are as bad as George; he cannot bear them; but then he hates every one here, excepting you and your mother; and that is because I knew Mrs. Singleton years ago; so he does not class you

with the Dunkerque English ; and I know every one dislikes him, and no wonder, for he is downright rude to them all. But I came to ask you if you will come with me to Lacroix's, and help me to choose a bonnet ?”

“ Yes, with pleasure, if mamma does not want me.”

“ Perhaps she would like to go with us ?”

“ I will ask her,” said Dacia, leaving the room to inquire, and hoping at the same time she would not. She thought the old saying very true, that two are company, three are none. But Mrs. Singleton did like to go ; and so they all went out together.

It was market-day, and the streets were very full of the country people, who came from Bergues, Rosendale, and the neighbouring villages, to lay in their week's provender. But, besides these, every lady in Dunkerque marketed for her own household, with the exception of Mrs. Singleton, who thought she would degrade herself to the level of a cook were she to do such a thing ; but, setting her own notions on the matter aside, she was as little capable of any thing of the sort as she would

have been to have made herself a dress, never having been known to use a needle and thread from the day she had ceased to be in her governess's leading-strings.

The Rue de l'Eglise, being the principal street from that side of the town leading into the Place, was more crowded than any other part, though the whole place seemed tolerably alive. Mrs. Percival and Mrs. Singleton walked in front, Dacia following. It was amusing to see Mrs. Singleton sweep by the people; her tall aristocratic look, however, was barely appreciated, that is, it created very little of the deference that it would have done amongst the same class of people in England. The Frenchwomen turned their heads to look at the tall lady in black; but in so doing their eyes fell on Dacia, who, though quite as graceful and high-bred looking, had a face that attracted kindly glances and undisguised admiration, when her mother but received looks that told more of astonishment, bordering sometimes on amusement, and wound up by a shrug of the shoulders.

They had not gone very far when Mr. Percival joined them; and, as was his wont, he instantly

appropriated Miss Singleton. She was nothing loth; she liked him extremely: about the only man in Dunkerque she did like.

“Take my arm, Miss Singleton, and let me pilot you through this mob of creatures calling themselves women. Can you conceive their belonging to the same sex you do? Just look at their huge coarse bodies, and listen to their frightful hooting voices. It would drive me wild, if I were a woman, to see such animals as these called the same as myself. I think there must have been an express mould made for the French female race; for, ’pon my life, the upper classes are little better than the lower: their outward appearance is better certainly, but their habits are disgusting. I saw that girl Léonie Hervieu the other day—she’s got a cold in her head, you know, Miss Singleton—well, I saw her take her handkerchief out of her pocket, spread it open before her, and—well, I will spare you the rest,” he continued, as Dacia made a sign of entreaty that he would cease. “But won’t you take my arm?”

“And face all the good people of Dunkerque, headed by Mr. Way, who hates me, and Miss

Chorley—who could not resist the gossip—declaring I was guilty of the utmost impropriety. I have lived long enough here to know that it is against all the social rules of Dunkerque for a lady and gentleman to walk about arm-in-arm.”

“What, with your mother and my wife before us?”

“In this crowd people might choose to be blind, and declare we were alone,” replied Miss Singleton, smiling.

“Well, Miss Singleton, I gave you credit for being above such contemptible nonsense.”

“No, I am not,” she replied honestly. “I know the people here don’t like me particularly as it is, so I need not do that which would give them an opportunity of justly saying ill-natured things. One must give in to social rules.”

“Very well, then, you will get crushed to pieces amongst all these baskets and barrels and things. Where in the world are they going to? surely not into the market?”

“It looks very much as if they were, for we are tolerably near it, and they seem to be going through it. We are bound for Lacroix’s.”

“You may as well be bound for the Antipodes, and expect to reach it to-night, as to get to Lacroix’s before dinner, if you attempt the market. It is just like women, choosing a day like this to go in that direction. Look there, there’s old Mrs. Merivale got hold of your mother already, and I see Mrs. Thomas and her dictionary daughter coming up towards you.”

“I am sure I don’t know what people would do without that dictionary daughter, as you call her. I see some one, however, not coming towards us, but that I mean to go towards, and say *bon jour* to. Will you come just across here with me,” she said, “that I may speak to the Butlers?”

Amidst the crowded mass that covered the whole of the market-place there was Mr. Butler, with his blind wife on his arm, threading his way and guiding her steps with such care and watchfulness that no harm could come to her. It was one of the poor old lady’s great amusements, going to market. She would pass her hand over fruit, vegetables, poultry, or game, and give her opinion concerning them; and generally it was a correct one. Her sense of touch was wonderfully fine.

It was only of late years she had become blind; it came very gradually; and when at last her doom was sealed, and she was told that never more would she see aught on earth, she met the crushing truth with a resignation that was almost incredible.

She was now past seventy, and Mr. Butler ten years her senior. For long years had they resided in Dunkerque; and though they had sons who were married and settled in England, and entreated them to come away and live amongst them in their native land, they both clung to the soil they had grown old on, and feared to transplant themselves to another, as, like old trees, they might wither and die in the attempt. Besides, their only daughter was near to them here, and her young family was almost as dear to the blind grandmother as if they had been her own.

Another reason in favour of their remaining in Dunkerque, there was not an inch of ground in their house that Mrs. Butler was not perfectly familiar with; she could feel her way to any spot, and lay her hand on any article she required. It would have been cruel to have removed her to

a strange unknown home, where, from her terrible affliction, she must have lost all feeling of comfort and security. There was not a more gentle, loving woman in the world than old Mrs. Butler. The most spiteful had a kindly word for her; the most envious were liberal in their praises of her.

To Dacia Singleton she was a perfect wonder. She always said that, were she so afflicted, she should hate the whole world that enjoyed the blessing she was shut out from.

When Mrs. Butler ever wished to be more intimately acquainted with one person than another, she used to ask them to let her feel their faces; and then she said she could picture them to herself, and felt as if she understood their character better.

Dacia had once or twice been to see Mrs. Butler before she made her this request. She had heard so much praise of Dacia's beauty, that, instead of it exciting her curiosity, she seemed to be indifferent to it; but one or two thoughtful actions had won over the old lady's heart, and then it was that she asked to be allowed to pass her hand over her face. She did so slowly and softly, repeating

the movement over each feature more than once, and asking her questions as to the colour of her hair and eyes. She seemed to have some difficulty in realising the colour of the former: she had pictured it to herself as being dark, and she could not divest herself of the idea. She often alluded to it; and as Dacia now came up and took her hand, telling her who she was, Mr. Butler said:

“Our English lily, my dear.”

“Ah,” she said, “the Dunkerque rose sounds to me the most natural. I believe it was that name they gave you that makes me still at times think of you with black hair.”

“Why, my stupid old dear, it is like burnished gold.”

“And waves. I felt the broad large waves that nature only can produce, not those nasty hard stiff ridges that the people make with hot irons.—Mr. Butler, these are very fine peaches.”

“Then, my dear, we will have some.”

And forthwith Mr. Butler began to squabble—as far as words went—with the fruit-woman, who commenced by asking five sous apiece for them, but ended in thankfully taking two.

Dacia stood by, laughing. It amused her immensely to hear the incessant fighting and quarrelling that went on between every purchaser and vendor, no matter what the article in question was that was to be sold.

“Now, Miss Singleton, we shall draw down that dreadful scandal you so dread if you stay much longer; for we shall quite lose sight of Mrs. Singleton and my wife.”

“What, are you with her, George?” said Mrs. Butler.—“I was going to ask where your mamma was, Miss Singleton.”

“Looming in the distance,” laughingly replied Dacia; “and I suppose I must say good-bye to you.—We have escaped the Thomases at all events,” she continued, as they left the Butlers and were threading their way across the market-place.

“Don’t be too sure. You are not out of the wood yet, Miss Singleton. I think at this moment she is within arm’s-length behind, meditating a descent.”

“Then I won’t be descended on,” said Dacia; “I dislike her too much.”

"Miss Singleton, Miss Singleton, stop a moment!" cried the Thomas voice behind her.

There was no help for it: she must stop, unless she were to be actually ill-bred. So she turned round.

"I thought so," said George Percival.

"Do you know all Dunkerque is talking of the masquerade you had the other night?"

"Serenade, mamma, serenade."

Dacia looked up in helpless bewilderment. Masquerade or serenade — both were equally unintelligible to her.

Mr. Percival smiled. He had heard of Hervieu's and Beauregard's folly, as he had also heard that the two young men had ended by having a rather warm discussion about the fair English girl; but he was not the man to tell her of such nonsense. He thought her above being flattered by so absurd a matter; but that, on the contrary, she would feel annoyed at their making her the object of common talk by what they had done.

"Miss Singleton is evidently ignorant of what all Dunkerque has been talking about, Mrs. Thomas; and you might as well have left her so," said

George Percival with a sneer, which he could not help accompanying almost all he said when talking to the people of the place; and then, turning to Miss Singleton, who was still looking with inquiring eyes, said:

“Two young French fools, thinking to please you, I suppose, or at any rate themselves, stood outside your house a few nights ago making a noise which disturbed the whole neighbourhood, excepting, apparently, yourself, for whom the questionable honour was especially intended.”

“Indeed! Whoever they were, I am sorry they gave themselves the trouble,” replied Miss Singleton, in somewhat the same sort of contemptuous manner Mr. Percival had spoken in.

“Well, I think you are very ungrateful, Miss Singleton,” remarked Mrs. Thomas. “I think it quite delirious to have people make so much of one.”

“Delicious, mamma, delicious.”

“I tell you it would make me delirious,” replied Mrs. Thomas in a sharp tone to her daughter’s correction—a flash of light crossing her mind that the word could be turned to account as she

had pronounced it; and whenever that occurred, she never let the chance escape of putting herself in the right.

"I do not care for such things," said Miss Singleton haughtily. "Good-morning, Mrs. Thomas;" and with a distant bow to mother and daughter, she continued her way through the maze of people and things by which they were surrounded; Mr. Percival following, and thinking what a pity it was that a girl like her should be doomed to live at Dunkerque: he hated the place and people so thoroughly.

"Then why is it you do not leave it?" asked Dacia, as he had just given expression to some such sentiment.

"Where can I go? I can't live in England on my income, and I can't get any thing to do. I am too old for any profession, and too old to commence a life that would entail my sitting at a desk for six or seven hours a day. No, there's nothing for it, I suppose, but patience."

"But time will only increase the evil, and not diminish it."

"No, I hope not. I have a stray aunt in

Ireland, that I believe will leave me something when she dies ; but old women never die. I don't know how it is, but if any thing is to be got by them, or if they are receiving pensions, they seem to live on and on, and nothing kills them. Why, she has been thrown out of a carriage, upset in a boat, and burnt out of her house, all within these last three years ; and she is past eighty, but nothing hurts her. I say with all my heart, Heaven preserve her ! but then let it be in heaven. Here we are at Lacroix's at last."

CHAPTER XII.

SUNDAY MORNING.

A BRIGHT genial sun shone over the old town of Dunkerque, lending temporary warmth to the otherwise cold clear air that blew up from the sea on Sunday the 8th of December. It was a day that made bare existence seem a boon, and health to enjoy it a double blessing.

The whole place was in a stir, as is invariably the case in most continental towns on a Sabbath day, more especially if Roman Catholic. The streets were thronged with gay dresses and happy faces. From the early hour of six, when some attend the first mass, up to ten o'clock at night, when a few couples may still be seen tarrying in their walk, speaking last words in a lingering manner, nothing could exceed the gay appearance of the place.

Some of the French provincial towns have on

this day even a brighter look than its beautiful capital; for whatever the Parisian's toilette may be in the week-days, on the Sunday they are completely cut out by the Dunkerquois, whose dress, on all fête-days indeed, is something quite extraordinary, as can be borne witness to by any one the least acquainted with Jean Bart's native town. There is no lack of taste either. You may with perfect safety—doubly so if you are an Englishwoman—put yourself in the hands of a Dunkerque milliner; and provided you do not introduce any of your own notions, or suggest what you may think improvements, you will be perfectly satisfied with the result.

There is something attractive in dress, and the love for it is very catching. People are told, when they are at Rome they must do as they do in Rome. There's not much necessity for the injunction. The truth is, customs and habits, when you are within their influence, are as infectious as epidemics. You can't help yourself. You pick up a habit, good or bad, as easily as a poor acquaintance, and afterwards find both equally difficult to free yourself from.

Mrs. Singleton had rapidly given way to the love that very soon possessed her for dress; and though, being in mourning, there was no great scope for the display of her own or her milliner's taste, yet she managed to pass a good portion of her day in arranging and rearranging her toilette. To Maxwell it became a source of profit as well as pleasure, for she gleaned lots of odds and ends that would otherwise have been carefully gathered into the wardrobe barn. Miss Singleton was totally exempt from the pandemic; it did not affect her in the slightest degree. She still retained her simple taste, dressing always with the greatest care and never-failing neatness. One would imagine she never gave the matter a thought; yet perhaps it required some, if not quite as much as more elaborate dress. However that may be, she formed a great contrast to all around her.

On Sundays the English did their best to make a sensation appearance in the room where service was performed, each individual walking to church with the questionable Christian-like desire of outvieing their neighbours, and walking home

again full of remarks tinged with spite and jealousy, which arose through finding or fancying they were not, on that morning, the best-dressed in the congregation. If an excuse could possibly be admissible for them, there certainly was one in the fact that Mr. Way was the clergyman who officiated.

Who could pray whilst that man shouted out the prayers in a rapid rollicking manner, his eyes wandering about the whole time in search of any new faces whose francs he would pocket at the conclusion of the service? Who could listen with the slightest chance of hearing any thing to edify them when he read out, as rapidly as his lips could give the words utterance, a wild rambling sermon, the only comprehensible part being that all were wicked alike? He might have added, without swerving from the truth, that he included himself in the general category. Perhaps he thought this unnecessary; or he may not have held that opinion, for he never made use of the pronoun *we*, but always *you*.

The 8th of December was just the right sort of day for pretty dresses and gay toilettes. It was

such a bright day, that one felt as if it were necessary to follow nature, and put on bright attire also. Mrs. Singleton did not often go to church; hitherto she had found it too warm, or else too cold. She and her daughter had two seats allotted to them near the door, which also was near the stove. They were not comfortable; but they were the best to be had unoccupied. However, to-day she resolved to go: not only the weather tempted her, but also the fact—though of course she did not admit this—of her having a new bonnet, which sparkled in the sun from the quantity of black bugles studded over it. Her dress, a rich black silk trimmed with crape and bugles, matched it; she perfectly glittered as she went along. In her hand she held her prayer-book, fan, and smelling-bottle.

“Really, Dacia,” she said, as they approached the house that did duty for a church, “you look so dowdy, I am ashamed of you. Maxwell dresses better than you do.”

“I daresay; but I cannot help it. I think the way people dress here quite ridiculous. What do they dress for?”

"To be pleasing to look at, which I am sure you are not. You always seem as if you were a Sister of Charity, or something not much better."

"I wish I were any thing half so useful. Look at those people coming along; do you really like such gorgeous dresses, mamma?"

"It is Mrs. Merivale and Miss Chorley: of course I do. Why, Dacia, what would Miss Chorley look like if she were not to dress as she does?"

"A gray parrot instead of one of all colours; and much better, I think."

"You really talk such nonsense. I shall be quite glad when you are out of mourning, that you may look a little more like other people."

They were at the door now; and so, except a few words to, or rather from, Chattering Chorley, who smiled more on Sunday than any other day in the week, they passed on to the narrow staircase which led up to a tolerably good-sized room, capable of holding from a hundred to a hundred and fifty people.

The room was nearly full; quite so at the upper end. In a few minutes in burst the colossal

parson, coming down upon his congregation like a mountainous wave. He bent his head for a moment or two in semblance of prayer. Heaven forbid one should misjudge a fellow-creature; but it seemed to those who watched him that he appeared as little unfit for the duty before him on raising his head, as he did on his entrance.

In the midst of reading the first Lesson, which he was rattling through in an easy off-hand manner—much as one would read an article in the *Times*—the door opened, and a gentleman walked in, and then stood still for a moment or two, till the man who, without acting as pew-opener, there being no pews to open, guided people to vacant chairs, showed him one which happened to be next to Miss Singleton. He was a tall, high-bred-looking man; young, but with a firmness of expression and serious look that does not often accompany youth. He took the seat given to him, and seemed to listen in pure amazement to Mr. Way's manner of reading, and afterwards with a degree of disgust on his countenance when he was delivering his sermon.

Every one present who saw the stranger enter,

with the exception of old Mr. Butler, began to puzzle their brains as to who he could be. When the service was over, finding it impossible to get out unless he pushed by the people, he remained standing till Mr. Butler came up, when a look of recognition, though a formal one, passed between them, and they went out together. The moment they were in the street, a large tall wiry-haired dog crossed over from the opposite side, and having thrust his long-pointed nose into the stranger's hand, which seemed ready to receive the salute, he followed him calmly and quietly, as if he was fully aware that on the Sabbath day every thing should be done peaceably and in order. He was clearly a dog of the world, and gave in to social laws.

"Dear me, who *can* that be?" said Mrs. Merivale, whose white crape bonnet, with feathers and geraniums, had drawn forth Miss Chorley's genuine admiration, unmixed with envy, for she was conscious of her own being in better taste, and so she could afford to be generous; not that that was rare with the little woman—kind words and actions sprang forth in plenty from her.

"Why, I shouldn't wonder if he belonged to that yacht, or the yacht to him, that put in here yesterday. I tried all I could to find out the name of the owner; but they told me some unpronounceable Dutch name, which I couldn't make head or tail of."

"I don't believe he's a Dutchman; do you? He doesn't look like one a bit. He looks English, doesn't he? And that dog is his, I suppose. What a brute! He ought to be muzzled."

"Well, I think it is pretty clear he is not Dutch," said Mrs. Percival, who had just been speaking to Mrs. Singleton, and now was listening with amusement to the various conjectures which the advent of a stranger, especially if a man and a gentleman, invariably gave rise to. "He would hardly have attended the English service had he been Dutch."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Thomas; "but Miss Chorley always has such prostitute ideas."

Miss Elizabeth Thomas was utterly at a loss for a moment to understand her mother; but in order to make up for the pause, short as it was, that ensued, and which caused dismay to spread

over every face who had heard Mrs. Thomas, when the dictionary daughter did come to the conclusion as to what her mother meant, she exclaimed sharply and loudly, so that all standing far and near heard, "Preposterous, mamma, preposterous!"

Of course Chattering Chorley smiled and looked pleasant, whatever feeling of annoyance worked within. She was, however, quite appeased now, and only declared she never said the man was Dutch or Dane; but only offered a surmise that he might be the owner of the yacht now lying in the port.

In the mean while Mrs. Singleton and her daughter had walked on towards home. They rarely joined the gossiping groups that assembled after morning church. Mrs. Singleton had not been able to reconcile herself to any communion of that sort, however much she wished to be *au fait* with the news of the town. They had not been in more than a few minutes, before Mr. Butler called. Dacia was in her own room, and Mrs. Singleton alone in the drawing-room.

"I have only come in for a moment," he said;

for he knew on Sundays the Singletons dined early; "but I thought I would just let you know our new consul has arrived, and he is coming here to call on you this afternoon."

"Mrs. Percival told us of his arrival as we came out of church. I suppose that was he sitting next to Dacia during service?"

"I did not see him in church; but as he asked me who the two ladies were in mourning by his side, I suppose it was. At all events, I told him it must have been you, as I do not think, excepting yourselves, there is any one in the place in mourning; and he replied directly that, whoever it was, the young lady next to him was very beautiful; to which I instantly agreed. It is rare to see so lovely a face."

"Really," said Mrs. Singleton in a vexed tone, "people talk such nonsense about Dacia, that if she hears it all she will become more conceited than ever. Will you kindly reach me my bottle? Thank you. I hope there will be no flirtation got up between her and this consul. By the bye, what is his name? Is it the Mr. Ivor Campbell every one seemed so anxious to have here?"

"No, no; his name is Mostyn. I think that Ivor Campbell must have been a myth. And as to this man flirting, I don't think you need fear any thing of the sort. If I can judge at all of character, I should say he could not flirt if his life depended on it."

"My dear Mr. Butler," said Mrs. Singleton languidly, and inhaling the salts, "you surely do not mean to tell me that the man walks who cannot flirt, if he meets a girl that will flirt with him?"

"Then Mr. Mostyn certainly won't with Miss Singleton; for I don't think she is capable of flirting."

"Ah, you don't know her. But never mind that. What made Mr. Mostyn so late in church? It was a bad beginning."

"He fancied the service began at half-past instead of eleven."

"O, Mr. Butler," said Dacia, coming in, looking brilliantly beautiful; for the keen air had brought a bright colour to her cheeks, "you are talking of the new arrival. I am afraid I am getting just as bad as all the rest of the people

in Dunkerque. I feel horribly curious about our dark dismal-looking consul, and almost as much about his proud stately dog, that walked so grandly after him."

"Well, my dear young lady, as far as a personal interview can gratify your curiosity, you will have it. He is coming to call on you presently."

"And the dog? If he takes him to church, he may surely bring him to pay visits."

"Really, Dacia, I am quite ashamed of you; and it is nothing more than that you want to hear about that poor wretched-looking man, Mr. Marsden. You say Dacia is not a flirt, Mr. Butler; I wish you could have seen her only a couple of days before we left England."

"You said but the truth, Mr. Butler, if you said so; I am not a flirt. I despise flirting. It is contemptible enough in a man, but it is worse in a woman."

"That is one of your aunt's moral reflections," said Mrs. Singleton with a sneer; "and I suppose she taught you to say it."

Miss Singleton made no reply; she was too

angry; but she turned round with an appealing look to Mr. Butler, and said, "Believe me still what you believed me before—incapable of any thing of the kind."

She naturally had a horror of such an accusation getting abroad in a place like Dunkerque; and though Mr. Butler himself might not repeat the little quarrel he had been a witness to, from ill-nature others might; and as Dacia had remarked to George Percival, she knew very well she was not over-liked in the place; certainly not owing to any fault of hers, but simply from the uncontrollable jealousy women feel for one that is better-looking than themselves; and therefore any thing detrimental to her would be well received by most of the women-kind in the town.

"I am a foolish old man, my dear," replied Mr. Butler; "but notwithstanding that, I think my intellect still clear enough to judge your character; and I think your good mother only spoke as she did in order to keep you from falling into the silly way of going on that some of our fair Dunkerque ladies are apt to do. Flattery is their daily bread, and they could not exist without it.

But I must be off. You know on Sundays we have a family-gathering, and sit down twelve to dinner; and just think of eleven voices being raised up against me for keeping their hungry mouths waiting!"

"Ah, how you are to be envied, Mr. Butler! What would I not give to have as many to care for me as you have!"

"My dear Mrs. Singleton, if I died to-morrow, nine of the eleven would be totally indifferent. My dear old wife would feel my loss bitterly, and my daughter would grieve; but what do you think Percival or his eight children would care? Not a sou! No, no, my dear lady; believe me, we are, after a certain age, only appreciated for what we can give or do for others. We may have one to love us, or two, for our individual selves; but that is very, very rare; and if it is so, we ought to consider ourselves especially blessed. It is but fair, after all. Each has their day, and that day dawns in youth and darkens in age. We must not expect its light to shine on us always."

"O, I do not agree with you in the least.

I think every one but myself has numbers to love them and care for them, and I have no one."

"No one! Why, look at that fair face before you. I think I see plenty of love written on it at this moment, and pain as well, that you should for an instant doubt it. If every mother had such a daughter, there would not be one that need call for sympathy."

"Dacia never loved me as most children love their mother. Her father was her favourite, and she was his. I believe latterly she was more to him than Cecily and myself put together; but it has been my lot through life to be afflicted mentally as well as bodily." And as she finished speaking, Mrs. Singleton passed her white hand slowly over her still smooth forehead. A slight regret arose within her as soon as the words were uttered that she had alluded to her husband's want of devotion before his death. It would not have mattered, had she not stated that her daughter received it instead of herself.

"I have talked you into a headache, I am afraid," said Mr. Butler; "and I am sure you will be glad to get rid of me."

"No, indeed, I am not; but a headache I am rarely free from, as you know," she replied, giving Mr. Butler her hand as he wished her good-bye.

When their visitor was gone, Dacia tried by a few kind words to drive away the cloud that was hanging over her mother.

"You are tired, mamma. Going to church has been too much for you. Will you lie down till dinner is ready? I will get a pillow for you."

"No, thank you; I am not quite so infirm as you would wish to make me out. I can still manage to go to church without being obliged to go to bed in consequence."

"Mamma, I did not mean any thing of the kind. But it is no use; try what I will, nothing pleases," she added, more to herself than her mother, as she took up a book and sat down by the window with the intention of reading; but she felt too vexed to fix her mind on any subject for the moment.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIRST VISIT.

HUGH MOSTYN, the newly-appointed English consul at Dunkerque, was located at the Hôtel du Chapeau Rouge till the house where the late consul had resided was put in proper repair. Mr. Freer, who had, in the absence of any other, been doing the consul's duties, had received a telegram on Saturday telling him that in the evening Mr. Mostyn would arrive, which intelligence he immediately communicated to Mr. Butler; and together they were to receive him at the station, and accompany him to the hotel, where they had previously given directions for all to be in readiness.

The new consul had not made a very favourable impression on the two Englishmen. He was too cold, too proud, too haughty in his bearing to create a liking on the part of those who had for

many years been accustomed to the geniality of foreign manners ; for, however shallow and insincere they may be, they are none the less pleasant to meet with. In home circles, English rough genuineness may be of greater worth, but for out-of-door life the creamy friendliness of our continental neighbours is preferable. And, after all, the out-of-door part of our existence is by far the most important ; we have daily to do with manners, but with the heart perhaps not once a year.

Neither of the two men imparted their thoughts to the other, but they both felt relieved when they had wished him good-night, and left him to his solitary grandeur. Mr. Freer thought with some regret of their late jovial consul, and Mr. Butler poured into the ear of his blind wife his lament over the ungracious way in which he thought Mr. Mostyn had received their friendly advances.

On the following day, however, Mr. Butler still continued his attentions, resolving that nothing should be left undone on his part. No one else—unless Mr. Freer—would be expected to show any peculiar civility, but he decidedly would, for he was quite the representative of the whole Bri-

tish community in the place, and what he did was as if they all did it; besides that, his manner of acting would be a guide to the rest. Therefore he considered he did nothing more than was actually his duty when he walked back with Mostyn to his hotel, after church. He did not stay more than a few minutes, for he was clearly not wanted. He gave the Singletons' address when asked, and offered to show him the way if he felt so disposed, but this was politely declined. He said he would easily find his way, once having the name of the street, but that he had one or two matters to attend to before he went out.

It was nearly four o'clock before the Consul started, accompanied by his dog, for his short walk. He had no difficulty in finding the Rue de l'Eglise; indeed any one who failed in finding any street in the whole place must have been marvellously devoid of the bump of locality. There were but three or four principal streets, and they all sprang from the centre spot of the town—the Grand Place.

Babette was out; she had asked leave to attend vespers; and as Mrs. Singleton made no inquiry

as to what hour service began or ended, Babette started off in all her Sunday finery as soon as she had got rid of the dinner, leaving Maxwell in possession of the kitchen; a proceeding of which Maxwell by no means approved. She thought it highly derogatory to her position to do parlour-maid's work. However, when the bell rang she issued forth in all her fine lady's-maidism to inquire who it was and what was wanted. She knew it well enough, but she thought it more proper to feign ignorance; and having given a slight start, which was not assumed, at the long-legged hairy dog that stood majestically at his master's side, and on receiving orders retired to a spot where he felt sure no one could tread on him, she inquired the visitor's name, and duly announcing him, retired again to her post, with an earnest hope that Mr. Mostyn might have a "gentleman" with him. He looked a likely person to have such an appendage; and if so, she anticipated some amelioration to her present dulness—Mr. Mostyn having a "gentleman," meaning simply a valet.

Maxwell, as she passed, gave a glance at the

dog. He was sitting bolt upright, and his eyes fixed on the door through which he had lost sight of his master. "What a beast to go about with!" she exclaimed; "he is enough to frighten one into fits."

Mrs. Singleton was leaning back on the sofa. She had become pretty well accustomed to its discomfort. Her eyes closed—not quite closing, but nearly so—the slanting rays of the setting sun resting on her thin, delicate-looking face, and producing a slight tinge of colour by no means unbecoming to her, and her scent-bottle resting on her dress, having slipped unconsciously from her hand. Miss Singleton was standing by the window, her head leaning against the side, the drapery of the curtains almost sheltering her from view. Actually she was doing nothing, but she was busy enough with thought. Her eyes were watching the gay crowds walking up the centre of the street, that were free from any fear of being run over, as a carriage in Dunkerque—if one ever appeared—was quite an exhibition, and one sufficiently attractive to draw all eyes upon it; her thoughts were far away in her distant English

home, or what till so lately had been. Her mother's allusion to her father had saddened her, and she gave way for the first time in her life to useless regrets. If her father, her dear father, had but lived; if this, if that had been, how different would all things have turned out! But Dacia Singleton had what few of her sex enjoy—common sense; and after a little it came to her aid. She knew how utterly useless it was to indulge in such idle dreams, or let her thoughts dwell at all on the past. Till now she had been happy enough, and she resolved to continue so. Strengthened by her resolution, she was turning round with a cheerful smile to make a remark to her mother, when the door opened, and Maxwell announced Mr. Mostyn.

Mrs. Singleton rose slowly, and received her visitor with quite as much *hauteur* as he himself could possibly have shown to Mr. Butler earlier in the day; but she intended to be as little cordial as possible, owing to his friendship with Henry Marsden; why, she neither asked herself nor cared to do so. The whole of her feelings in connection with her youngest child were somewhat contra-

dictory and difficult to understand. There was, and always had been, a mixture of jealousy and affection not often, fortunately, to be met with. She was annoyed if any marked attention was shown to her daughter, but equally so if she fancied she was not treated with sufficient deference. She was a Singleton ; and as such she thought too much could not be paid her ; but if possible, she would have been the medium through which it was received. She would, if she could, have kept Dacia in the background like a child, only to be brought forward at her mother's will and pleasure ; and the impracticability of this having, especially since John Singleton's death, become more apparent, rendered her more captious and irritable when there existed no seeming cause.

After one or two national remarks on the weather, Miss Singleton, who had no desire to mount her high horse also, asked in a tone that, by comparison with the formal manner her mother and Mr. Mostyn had been talking in, sounded especially soft and gentle, "When you saw my sister in London, did you think her looking well?"

"If looking bright and happy is looking well,

she certainly did; but you know I could hardly be a judge, never having seen her before. She is not the least like you, Miss Singleton."

His voice, too, sounded pleasanter than it had done before. It gave one the impression before, as if he and Mrs. Singleton were natural enemies, and that common decency prevented their giving free play to their feelings, and expressing their sentiments openly to one another.

"Yes, my daughters are very different," said Mrs. Singleton, in a tone implying that she meant in disposition as well as appearance.

"My sister is generally thought like mamma, and I used to be like my poor father. Cecily wrote to us that you had dined with her one evening; but that is some little time ago; have you seen her since?"

"Yes, twice since that day," replied Mostyn, fixing his full clear eyes steadily on Dacia. He thought, notwithstanding the stern sombre look on his handsome face, there was something she liked in his expression. "My friend Marsden, as you of course heard, introduced me to your sister, and he insisted upon my calling there

perhaps oftener than was agreeable. I am the bearer of a small packet for you, Mrs. Singleton, and also a letter, which I took out of my desk just now, intending to bring, but I stupidly left it behind me; I will, however, send my servant round with it as soon as I get back."

"Thank you. I thought probably my daughter had written."

"Did you ever see my aunt, Mrs. Ewart, at my sister's?" asked Miss Singleton.

"Once; the last time I was in Hertford-street she was there."

"And did she say any thing about coming over to see us?"

"No, she did not allude to it in any way."

"Did she not send me—us—any message?"

"Really, Dacia, Mr. Mostyn will be worn out by your foolish questions. Pray, how many more are you going to ask?"

Mostyn looked up surprised at the tone in which Mrs. Singleton addressed her daughter.

"O, you must forgive me teasing you with all these questions; I forgot that they could not interest you; but it is such a great pleasure to

see any one that has just arrived from dear old England, and seen my sister and aunt. I feel as if I had been away so long, and every thing I can hear about them gives me pleasure."

"And I assure you it affords me equally as much to tell you the little I know. I must not forget to deliver one message, however, that Mrs. Ewart did send, though I am afraid, if I give it literally, it will not sound very courteous from the lips of a stranger."

"Never mind that; provided you give it me correctly, I will forgive it, whatever it is," said Dacia with a smile.

"Then I was to tell you, you were excessively lazy, and that unless you shortly redeem your character, Mrs. Ewart will cease to hold any further communion with you."

"Dear Mum!" exclaimed Dacia. "Was that all? I was so in hopes she would have said something about spending Christmas with us."

"Yes, that was all from her; but I have yet another message for you from Henry Marsden." Mostyn paused a moment, and watched Miss Singleton's countenance very closely, as he men-

tioned his friend's name. Had the day not closed in, and the light from the fire cast a fictitious colour over her face, he would have seen the natural glow that overspread it as he spoke; but it arose simply from the recollection of her sister's letter and her remarks about him.

"Has he not yet left England?" asked Mrs. Singleton. "I thought he was told to avoid the winter in a cold climate."

"He crossed to Calais with me yesterday, and continued his way to Paris, *en route* for Cannes. Had I not been very firm with him, he would have come round by Dunkerque, declaring it was not the least out of his way, and so have run risks that might have proved very serious to him. However, I promised to give him a welcome in the spring; and so he desired me to say, Miss Singleton, that he hopes to meet you again, as he told you he should, the moment he is allowed once more to breathe the northern air."

"It will give me the greatest pleasure to meet him again," replied Dacia, who had perfectly recovered her self-possession, but had a nervous dread that her mother might say something vex-

ing on the subject; "but I am very glad you dissuaded him from delaying his journey to the south; the weather is cold, and in the mornings we frequently have heavy sea fogs, which I am sure would be very bad for him. You do not think him worse, do you?"

"He is not better; I fear he never will be." Mostyn's voice was lowered as he replied. He evidently felt deeply on the subject.

"Of course he will not," said Mrs. Singleton; "one has but to look in his face, to see death written there."

The words, and tone they were spoken in, jarred painfully both on Dacia and Mostyn. It is distressing to hear any one we are interested in, and who is in either sorrow or sickness, spoken of in a careless light manner; still more so if it be one that is especially loved; and Henry Marsden was as dear to his friend as a brother.

Mostyn now rose to leave: he merely bowed to both ladies; he had lived so much away from his own country, that he had not the English habit of shaking hands with people, unless he was on very intimate terms.

“Poor Marsden!” he thought, as he slowly strolled back towards his hotel, with his dog by his side. “Poor fellow! I doubt much if that girl cares for him; and if she does, what would it matter? She would be false to him if it suited her. Better far that he should be a little disappointed now, than have his heart torn to shreds and his honour trampled under foot later. I believe every woman breathing is innately false; it is chance, and nothing more, if she goes through life honestly and truthfully. Their whole existence is a lie. They are born and bred to deceive. However, it matters little to me; I need not care what they are: but I would spare Harry unnecessary sorrow, if I could. I am glad I did not let him come here now, for by the spring, if he is alive and able to come, that girl will be married. She is very beautiful, there is no doubt. He said no more in her praise, as far as her face goes, than she deserves; but I suppose she is like her sister in other respects, vain and frivolous. That fellow Moncrieffe will have his eyes open some day to the folly of trusting a woman. I would as soon trust to a sprained ankle! They

can't help falling, I really believe. I should have felt rather disposed in favour of Miss Singleton, had I not, like a burnt child, learnt to dread the fire; and besides that, her mother seems a weak silly woman, and no doubt she is the same. No, old fellow," he added, laying his hand on his dog's head, "there's no friend, no companion, that will be ever half so devoted and faithful as you are. We have gone on very steadily and quietly for a couple of years; we won't now let any thing interfere with our peace."

And with such reflections and resolutions did Hugh Mostyn and Sancho get back to the hotel. Mostyn rang his bell, and sent his servant off immediately with Mrs. Moncrieffe's letter, and desired him to say the packet should follow the next day, as it was packed up in a trunk that had not yet been opened.

Maxwell thus had her hope fulfilled; and Mr. Mostyn's "gentleman" seemed as gratified at the discovery of Maxwell's existence as she was at his; however the masters seemed disposed to keep aloof from too close an intimacy, no such sentiment appeared likely to influence the servants.

When Dacia and her mother were again alone, she made an attempt once or twice to talk to her about their visitor ; but Mrs. Singleton was not in a conversational mood, and only made short replies, and those not amiable ones ; so she gave it up, and sat brooding over the subject ; wondering, as one does wonder, on any matter that interests us, all sorts of foolish things, and feeling certain that the new Consul was not at all likely to meet with much sympathy in Dunkerque society, if he maintained the same haughty, proud manner he had assumed with them—or she might more correctly have put it, her mother.

Mrs. Ewart had no cause to complain of the length of her niece's next letter, nor of the period she allowed to elapse between it and the one that succeeded it.

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. THOMAS HAS HER OWN WAY.

FOR nearly a week after his arrival Hugh Mostyn was daily inundated with visitors—men, women, and children, French and English; they flooded on him with a determination that was more flattering than pleasant. But one man had kept aloof, and that was George Percival. On the fourth day he left his card; but beyond that the Consul heard and saw nothing of him, which probably was the reason of Mostyn's returning his visit before he did any other. They were both men of proud reserved tempers; so the chances were, unless some unforeseen circumstances drew them together, they would remain strangers to each other.

Mrs. Thomas was exceedingly indignant with her husband because he absolutely refused to take her with him when he went to pay his respects.

She could never understand how Mr. Thomas dared oppose her wishes; for, as she incessantly drummed into his ear, "you married me for my fortune, and though it is imperceptive," meaning in perspective, "you know that it is all you care about."

"Yes, my dear, it is imperceptive," was the retort; "you never spoke a truer word."

Mr. Thomas was a stout, red-faced, white-haired man, not of the most amiable of tempers—his wife had thoroughly succeeded in destroying it—and verging on sixty. If ever he opposed her in any foolish fancy, of which she was over-burdened, she, as in the present instance, nagged at him not for a day only, but for a week at least. They lived in a house in the Rue de Sechelles; but the disorder and confusion that incessantly reigned within rendered it more like a bear-garden than any thing else.

They were seated at breakfast, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas and four children—the elder ones; the other two being too young to be available for the family breakfast-table. Mrs. Thomas had her tall angular body encased in a dirty tumbled cotton

wrapper; Mr. Thomas was her equal in his outer garments, excepting the material, his dressing-gown being woollen. Miss Thomas had on a black-and-green-checked dress that was terribly the worse for wear; the other three children were not one bit better in any respect.

“I really think, Thomas”—Mrs. Thomas always addressed her husband by his surname—“it is shameful the way you treat me in; all my wishes go for nothing, and all my endeavours to further the propriety of my family are scored.”

“For heaven’s sake hold your stupid tongue!” was the only reply her husband vouchsafed to this remonstrance.

Miss Thomas never thought of explaining her mother’s misspoken words at home; they were thoroughly intelligible to her family circle.

“But I tell you I have an object in view. I especially wish to call on the Consul, as I have the welfare of a certain member of our family in procreation. Mr. Mostyn may prove a very, very—a proper sort of person;” she was at a loss here for a good word; “and by our showing ourselves hospital people, we may be able to get intimate

with him. I am quite sure if we are not very active, that creature Mrs. Singleton will catch him for her pale-faced, yellow-haired daughter."

"O, that's what you are driving at, is it?" said Mr. Thomas, without lifting his eyes off an old *Times* newspaper he was, or seemed to be, reading. "Well then, take my advice, and let it drop; with me, at any rate, it won't do. I will be no party to husband-catching."

Mrs. Thomas knew very well, by the tone this was said in, there was not a vestige of use in discussing the matter further. So, after finishing a tepid cup of coffee, she got up, leaving her husband to help himself and the children also, if he or they required any thing more, merely remarking in a tone of intense anger as she left the room,

"You're a brute, Thomas—a bouncing brute!"

A quiet smile passed over Thomas's red face, and he went on with his paper, nothing disturbed by the immediate warfare that was openly proclaimed between the two youngest children present the moment their mother's back was turned. There is nothing like custom to reconcile one to any thing; so that when, as a climax, the coffee-

pot was turned over and a brown stream came flowing rapidly along the table till it reached the spongy woollen dressing-gown, soaking the shirt-sleeve within, as well as the fat arm that was resting on the table, Mr. Thomas, beyond endeavouring to box the ears of whoever was nearest to him, and shaking as much of the liquid down as would come, was contented to finish his paper before he made an attempt to remove his coffee-steeped garment.

It was Mrs. Thomas's rule, and that of her household, not to dress—so as to be presentable to the outer world—till after dinner; and they always dined at one o'clock. As far as the fashion of the place went, it was not necessary, as no one ever paid or received visits in Dunkerque till after two o'clock; therefore, unless their individual comfort required it, the people might walk about their houses in their night-garments.

At a little before three on the day of Mrs. Thomas's failure in attempting to make her husband take her with him to the Consul's, she was ready equipped for the streets. No one, looking at her now, could possibly believe her the same

woman that looked such a dirty drab in the morning. Her dictionary daughter was with her, equally well got up.

Mrs. Thomas's face portended something about to be done out of the usual routine. She looked fussy and excited, her eyes danced with a little contented yet anxious look, and she seemed, before going out, to be excessively anxious about learning her husband's movements. Where was he going first? Had he any thing to do before he went to pay his visit to the Consul?

"What the devil is it to you where I am going?"

"My dear, I was desirous of knowing, because if you were going towards the port, you might have told Meridon not to mind sending the boots I ordered for Lottie; for I find they will be supercilious."

"Go and countermand your supercilious boots yourself! I am going straight to the Chapeau Rouge."

Mrs. Thomas had learnt all she required to know.

"Where are you going, mamma?" asked Miss Thomas, now that they were in the street.

“*Prima facie* to the Hervieus, and afterwards I have another visit to pay, in conjugation with which I must—”

“Pray, mamma, when you are out any where, try and avoid Latin words; for I declare I can’t explain what you mean if you do. The English ones are hard enough sometimes.”

“Why do you persevere at all with what I say?” asked Mrs. Thomas snappishly. She did not care one straw about her failing herself; indeed she was hardly conscious of it, it had grown on her so gradually; and her only annoyance connected with it was her daughter’s constant corrections.

The Hervieus were at home. Léonie rushed up to Elizabeth Thomas, and received her with all the affectionate demonstration she invariably displayed to any girl she had no cause to be jealous of. It was very pleasant for her to feel there was some one by her side whose inattractive looks by contrast made her own seem so much more fascinating. Neither was she behind in flattery on such occasions.

“*Mais que tu est charmante aujourd’hui, Eli-*

sabeth!" she exclaimed, looking at poor Miss Thomas's convex-shaped face, but which wore a pleased look; for flattery is as welcome to a woman as cream to a cat.

"You can afford to pay compliments, Léonie," replied Miss Thomas, moving a little nearer to her mother as she spoke, knowing very well she would be wanted; for though Madame Hervieu talked very good English, it was beyond her capabilities to make head or tail of Mrs. Thomas's."

"Have you heard that Mrs. Merivale's son is likely to pay her a visit soon?" asked Madame Hervieu.

"No," replied Mrs. Thomas; "I did not know she suspected him."

"Expected, mamma! expected!"

"I am sick of hearing about Merivale's son," said Léonie. Since they came to live at Dunkerque, Mrs. Merivale has talked of no one else."

"Well, *ma petite*, he may prove as fascinating as she says he is; and then, I am sure, we shall be glad to welcome him,—*n'est-ce pas?*"

"Not I, grandmamma, at all events!" said

Léonie, with a toss of her pretty head. "It is like the English consul; the very thought of him puts me in a rage."

"Why?" asked Miss Thomas.

"Why! because you English are making such a horrible fuss about him. And what is he, after all? only a man."

"And a very sober, steady, quiet man too," said Madame Hervieu.

"Have you seen him, Madame Hervieu?" asked Mrs. Thomas.

"Yes; I called with the General yesterday."

"There, Elizabeth! You see I ought to have accommodated your father.—He would not let me go with him, madame; and it stands to reason if you could go, so could I."

Madame Hervieu shrugged her shoulders and pursed up her lips.

"It is the fashion here," she said, "but perhaps not in your country, for ladies to call on any one who comes to fill an official post."

"It's because she talks so oddly, perhaps?" asked Léonie Hervieu in an under-tone to Miss Thomas, who nodded an assent she feared to

speaking; for her mother would never have forgiven her had she thought she discussed her failing with any one, though she would not consider or admit it as such herself.

"Did you see the Consul, Léonie?"

"Yes, of course I did. Grandmamma would make me go too. A regular Englishman; *fière, mais fière à faire peur! Il est beau, il n'y a pas à dire; mais, mon Dieu, il a l'air si farouche que j'étais bien contente de m'en aller.*"

"Ah, you are talking of our handsome Consul," said Chattering Chorley, coming in, smiling from ear to ear. "I know you were, Léonie, because I heard just now that you had said you could not endure him. I have just come from the Watsons. They are quite charmed with him, and said he was so polite to them, and——"

"Well, I suppose he is a tamed savage. But the Watsons would call him polite any way; they think every one is polite," replied Léonie. "However, I think him simply detestable."

"Do you know," said Miss Chorley, "the only people he has called on yet are the Singletons, and he went to them last Sunday after

church ; and he only arrived the night before. Isn't it strange ? Do you know I shouldn't at all wonder if he fell in love with that beautiful Miss Singleton."

"I don't see why Miss Singleton's abstractions should be instructive ——"

"Attractions and productive, mamma !"

"—— should be destructive of more admiration than the substractions of several other young ladies I could name."

"O dear, O dear !" exclaimed Miss Thomas despairingly.

"*Ni moi non plus, madame !*" said Léonie, gathering Mrs. Thomas's meaning. "Why here is our *charmante Elisabeth* ; fancy her becoming *la grande dame parmi vous autres Anglaises* here in Dunkerque !"

Mrs. Thomas gave a significant smile, as if that point was already settled ; and having chatted a little longer, she rose, saying she had other visits to pay, and it was getting late. Miss Elizabeth followed her mother, hampered by a new and wild idea that she *was* fascinating, and might after all have as good a chance of becoming the Con-

sul's wife as any of the other young ladies on their preferment. Perhaps she had.

"Are you going to the Butlers?" asked Miss Chorley, just as Mrs. Thomas reached the door; "because if so, I will go with you. I want to see poor dear Mrs. Butler."

"No, no; I am going quite in another direction;" and before Miss Chorley could say another word Mrs. Thomas hurried off with her daughter.

"Funny woman, that Mrs. Thomas," remarked Miss Chorley, returning to finish off her visit a little less abruptly than she would have done, had she been able to hook herself on to the Thomases. "She must be a little mad, or she will be soon, if she goes on getting worse, as she has lately." Miss Chorley smiled pleasantly over the idea.

Hugh Mostyn had just bowed out Mr. Way. Mr. Way had paid his respects to the Consul on the Monday after his arrival; this was his second visit; but the impression made on the Sunday morning, when he heard him rattling over the prayers, had not been improved.

"A huge beast and nothing more," was Mostyn's inward thought as he saw the colossal pro-

portions of the British chaplain disappear. Sancho had shown no friendly feelings towards him. The dog was a great discerner of character; he never erred. When Mr. Way first entered the room he growled audibly; but watching his master closely, and perceiving no signs of enmity on his part, he contented himself by lying down close to Mostyn, but where he had the parson well in view, and he never took his eyes off him. He clearly had his suspicions, which were not to be removed by a seeming friendliness of manner. When he was gone, he ran his long thin nose into his master's hand, as much as to say, "We've got rid of him."

"Why, Sancho, you have a worse impression of him than I have."

Sancho seemed perfectly to understand every word said to him; he looked up steadily for a moment, and then went and lay down—but keeping the door in view—at Mostyn's feet.

The moment the Consul felt sure Mr. Way must be well gone, he rang his bell. The waiter answered the summons very quickly; he had learnt already that monsieur would not put up with being kept waiting.

"Monsieur a sonné?"

"Send my servant here.—Hervey," he continued when the man came, "will you see that no one else is let in. I have letters that must go by to-night's mail, and I cannot be disturbed any more."

Hervey bowed and disappeared. Then Mostyn began his letters. One to his mother, that ought to have gone two or three days ago, another to Henry Marsden, and some business letters. He was in the very middle of the first, giving his mother an account of the place and the people, as far as he could judge of either, omitting, however, all mention of the Singletons—every thing concerning them he kept for Marsden. Certainly if Hugh Mostyn could have been possibly guilty of writing a comic letter, this was one; from the big parson down to poor old blind Mrs. Butler, he described them; the old lady was the only one he spared. Had the letter fallen into the hands of any of the residents, and they had seen what impression they had produced on their handsome Consul, heaven knows what sort of life he would have led in the place. He was

sketching grinning Chattering Chorley, when Hervey showed his face, which wore a perplexed look.

“What is it?” asked his master, looking up and speaking sharply.

“Well, sir, there are two ladies asking for you. I said at first you were not at home, but they didn’t seem to understand that only meant you couldn’t see them; for they said they were sure you were not out, the waiter told them so. So then I said you were engaged and couldn’t be disturbed; but they insisted on my bringing up this card, and said they were quite sure you would receive them. It was the old one spoke, though the young one explained what she meant; for she spoke in such an odd manner I couldn’t make it out, sir.”

“Thomas! Why, a Mr. Thomas called this afternoon; it must be some more of his family. O, I suppose you must let them in, as they know I am in the house. Show them up, Hervey.—What in the world can women want with me?” wondered Mostyn when his servant left the room. “If they only knew how much I should prefer

their staying away. Besides, I can do nothing, for the way in which they all beset me. I am afraid I shall not like this place, though it must be better when I get into my own house ; there, at any rate, I can have quiet."

"Mrs. and Miss Thomas."

"I could not allow my husband to be the only membrane of my family to call and pay you the respect due to one filling the position you do amongst the English reservoirs in Dunkerque. So I have come, Mr. Mostyn, with my daughter—Miss Thomas, my eldest daughter—to tell you how dissembling we are that fortune has sent us one so flatulent and gifted as I understand you to be; and to say how highly honoured we shall feel if you will condescend to look upon our house as yours whilst you are included from your own. I know it will be but a temporal pleasure, but still it will not be the less valued."

Mostyn, who had by sign requested the two ladies to be seated, for he could not get in a word to do so otherwise, now stood with his large expressive eyes staring in bewildered amazement. That he was of the same opinion as Miss Chorley

in thinking Mrs. Thomas rather mad, is saying very little; he thought her some unfortunate lunatic that had escaped, and he turned to the dictionary daughter, who was, like himself, utterly dumbfounded; her mother had rattled on at such a pace, she had no opportunity of giving out her usual explanations, and when she did cease, she thought it perfectly useless, as well as next to impossible, to offer the slightest clue to what she meant. On the other hand, Mrs. Thomas began to think the tall handsome man before her excessively ill-bred. He might at any rate thank her for her civility, she thought, if nothing more. Finding no one spoke, she said:

“Mr. Thomas, I believe, has paid his prospects to you. Mr. Thomas, a buff-looking man, is my husband. Perhaps he did not mention his being a familiar man. The fact is, he is by no means a hospital person, and so I dissolutely determined to come with my daughter, and distress upon you how elevated we shall be if you will take us as you find us, and consonantly drop in whenever you are not otherwise engraved.”

“Mamma, if you go on so, I can’t help you!”

Then, after a moment's pause, she added, in a really distressed tone, "Mr. Mostyn seems very busy; I think we must be disturbing him; had we not better go?"

At this moment Sancho, who had remained up till now quiet and invisible, came forward and walked straight up to the ladies. They naturally gave a start, a little scream, and a volley of ridiculous words burst out from poor Mrs. Thomas.

"He is perfectly harmless," said Hugh. "Lie down again, Sancho." The dog instantly walked back in a stately manner to his retreat, and then his master continued: "Really, I am afraid you think me very uncourteous; but—the fact is—I do not quite understand you. Can I be of any service to you?—Miss Thomas," and he turned to the young lady, "can I call any one to assist you?"

He thought to get the mad woman back to where she came from was more than the younger one could accomplish alone. Both ladies, however, looked surprised. They had asked for no assistance.

"O, dear, no; we want no resistance, thank you! We only came to offer to resist you—"

"But, madam, I have no desire to oppose you, I assure you."

"O, I was quite sure you would not; but we heard so much of your preserve that—"

"There must be some mistake," said Hugh, thinking he was taken for a confectioner. "I have no preserves; and if you will but tell me if there is any thing in which I can be of use to you, I shall be very happy; if not, my time is somewhat occupied, and—"

"O, mamma, do let us go!"

"Nonsense, my dear; Mr. Mostyn does not demoralise who we are; but if we are really constraining your time, which must, of course, be very volatile, we will not restrain you longer. But I shall look forward with great pleasure to deceive you in my own house."

As Mrs. Thomas thus held out a hope of speedily going, Mostyn determined no word or look of his should give her a chance of changing her mind. As she stood up, and held out her well-gloved hand for Mostyn to take, which he seemed rather shy of doing, she said:

"I did not tell you my father is Jackson and

Johnson, the enervated brewers. I mean one of them is my father. I was Miss Johnson, the daughter of the seeming partner. Properly you are antiquated with Jackson and Johnson?"

"Mamma means, do you know them?" said Miss Thomas, seeing the intensely amused look on Mostyn's face. She could bear any thing but being laughed at.

"I know them by reputation, and I am a great friend to their beer," he said.

"Then you must come to us consonantly at Christmas-time; for Jackson and Johnson always send us over a barrel of their best, and I am sure, when you taste it, you will say it is the most delirious that ever was made."

"I shall be most happy to do so," said Mostyn, willing to promise any thing, so long as he got rid, by doing so, of his strange visitors.

"Now I shall go away quite distorted. Remember you are not to be fordable with us, and I shall inspect you soon."

Miss Thomas had already made her escape; she seized the first opportunity, and did not wait even to wish the Consul good-bye; she was too

thankful to get away. I don't think after that visit she ever thought again of becoming the Consul's wife. She awoke very speedily from her short day-dream.

CHAPTER XV.

SANCHO'S IMPRESSION IS FAVOURABLE.

It was some days after the Thomas's visit that Hugh Mostyn was walking down the Rue de l'Eglise, towards the Rue du Sud, whither he was going to see when his house was likely to be finished and ready to receive him, that he saw Mrs. Thomas, with two of her children—her dictionary daughter not being one of them—making towards him. To escape was his first thought, and where to, the next; for the recollection of their first interview was quite sufficient to impel him to any step in order to avoid a second. As fate would have it, a couple of houses brought him to the Singletons' door; and in he rushed, hardly giving himself time to think what he was doing. Had he been trying to escape the horrors

of an avalanche, he could not have been more rapid in his endeavours to escape it. He walked with quick steps along the dark stone passage—he seemed to know his way tolerably well—and ascended the stairs two steps at a time, as if he were being pursued by some evil spirit. Sancho thought something was amiss, for he declined to leave his master's side. Hugh was out of breath when he reached the landing; and then he recollected he had forgotten to ring the bell; but he would not go down again; so he hunted about, and found it suspended just outside the kitchen-door; he gave it a touch, and Babette appeared.

“Is Madame Singleton at home?”

Babette thought not; but she would go and see. She returned in a moment. Madame was out, but Mademoiselle was at home; and would Monsieur walk in. Mostyn knew some one was at home, for he heard the piano, and, he fancied, singing as well. He thought it would not seem courteous if he now declined going in; yet he rather objected to the idea of a *tête-à-tête* conversation with any woman; however, the vision of Mrs. Thomas in the street, and of the chances, if

he did not, of perhaps really meeting her and no hope of escape, decided him ; so he followed Babette into the pretty drawing-room.

"You beautiful fellow !" was Miss Singleton's greeting.

For half a second Hugh stood like one petrified ; then he saw his dog by his side, and he understood the exclamation. But during that half second he thought he had but escaped one lunatic to fall into the hands of another.

"Go out, Sancho !—I apologise, Miss Singleton, for this intrusion. I had no notion my dog had come in."

"Do not send him out. Is he gentle ? Pray let him stay ;" and Miss Singleton placed her hand on Sancho's head, and he remained passive under the caress. From that day forth Sancho and Dacia were friends—friends to the end. Presently he lay down beside her, his calm intelligent face looking up gratefully into hers. He had understood the whole scene ; and I think he had some undefined notion that Miss Singleton had done his master a service as well as himself.

Miss Singleton was closing the piano as her

visitors entered. Hugh was passionately fond of music, and wondered whether she could play, or merely do as most young ladies do, make a great noise and no melody. Whether or no, he was willing to think her as incapable as all others, and so make no inquiry about it. The conversation was not very brilliant. Presently Miss Singleton said :

“Mamma will regret being out; but she generally takes her walk at this hour. How do you think you will like Dunkerque—or rather, the people?”

“Indeed I ought to like them very much, for they so overwhelm me with attention, that I positively have not a moment to attend even to business, much less pleasure; and I feel at this moment I have no right to intrude on you; for, to tell you the honest truth, I came in here, as a ship fearing to encounter a gale would make for the nearest port to avoid it, and not to pay a visit.”

There was a lightness in Hugh's tone, and a brightening up of his countenance as he spoke that rather surprised Dacia, who could not the least understand what he meant; but he seemed

evidently amused; and it was totally against her preconceived idea of his character that he could possibly have any thing approaching to fun or merriment in his composition.

"I am at sea," she said, laughing, "though you seem to think yourself in a harbour."

"Do you know any one of the name of Thomas?"

"O yes; they live here for the education of their children, I believe."

"But Mrs. Thomas—is she mad?"

"No, not mad; at least as far as her actions go, though certainly her words are peculiar. She has an unhappy knack of always saying wrong words, at times making the most ridiculous meaning, at others having no meaning at all. She goes about with a daughter who interprets what she wishes to say, and has obtained, in consequence, the name of the dictionary daughter."

"Yes, those are the people. They called upon me; but the dictionary daughter failed in her interpreting powers, for she seemed as utterly confounded by it as I was. I assure you I thought the elder lady had escaped from an asylum, and

the younger one too bewildered to know what to do with her."

"What did they call on you for?" Miss Singleton asked the question in simple astonishment, not from curiosity.

"They did not tell me; or at least if they did, —or rather Mrs. Thomas, for she spoke all the time,—I failed in understanding. She talked of my preserves and her buff husband, and the English reservoirs, till I confess I almost began to fancy my own intellect must be giving way, or that my ears had ceased to do their duty."

Dacia laughed with such a merry ringing laugh—so genuine, so unaffected—that Mostyn could not do otherwise than join in it. It was long since he had laughed so heartily.

"She is natural, at all events," he thought, as he looked at her; "and there is a calmness in her beauty that could hardly be there unless she possessed a conscience that had nothing to reproach her with; but she is young now: a few years more, and she will become like the rest of her sex, —false and faithless!"

These ideas flashed through his brain very

rapidly, and he looked gloomy and sad immediately after.

"What in the world possesses Mr. Thomas to let his wife go about, I wonder? It would be much better if she stayed at home and looked after her children. Have you seen Mrs. Butler yet?"

"The poor old blind lady? Yes. I went to see her—the only visit I have paid, except to yourselves. I went there, for Mr. Butler has been very attentive and civil to me. He met me on my arrival, and the other day put me in the way of getting my house finished more rapidly than I otherwise should have done."

"They are a charming old couple, and the Percivals are pleasant people. She is their daughter."

"I should like to see Mr. Percival, for the simple reason that he has been the solitary exception, I believe, amongst all the inhabitants of the place in not seeking a personal interview with me."

"He is a proud man, and not likely to seek any one. I always feel sorry to think a man with his knowledge of the world, and his desire to live

in it, should be doomed to pass his existence in a place like this, where he has no occupation of any kind."

"Then why does he stay here?"

"For the reason, I fancy, that keeps all the English here,—want of means."

Miss Singleton coloured up as she spoke; not that she was ashamed of being poor, but she did not care to brood over it, still less to talk about it.

"There are not many French residing here?" said Mostyn, anxious to change the subject.

"Not a great many; in fact, the society is very narrow altogether. The Hervieus head the French community, as Mr. Butler does the English. But you will have an opportunity of judging of the whole collectively; for I suppose the long-talked-of ball in honour of your arrival, which is to be given at the Hôtel de Ville, will soon take place."

"A ball for me! I hope most sincerely nothing of the kind will be. I never go to balls, Miss Singleton."

"Never go to balls!" exclaimed Dacia, looking

astonished; "why, do you not like them? I think there is nothing so thoroughly enjoyable as a good dance. I have been looking forward with so much pleasure to this ball. O, do not say you would not go, or they might not have it, and I should be so disappointed!"

Hugh's stern expression—now natural to him—softened as he gazed at Dacia's pleading face; it was innocent and lovely enough to touch him even; and there was something in her openly expressed liking for a frivolous amusement that was appreciated by the man of the world, who had hitherto had the misfortune to fall amongst a class of women who, in order to win his admiration, gave in to his notions and likings. Therefore he was as pleased as surprised to find Miss Singleton had no intention of laying siege to him in that form, at any rate.

Hugh Mostyn's handsome face had proved almost a curse to him; and yet it was a stern kind of beauty, and always had been; but now there was a sombre sadness that overspread his whole features, which to women increased rather than diminished his attractiveness. It called forth sym-

pathy ; it gave the impression that some great sorrow had overshadowed his existence. Yet when he smiled all trace of harshness was lost ; his countenance brightened up for the moment as if by magic ; a ray of gladness overspread his features, making the contrast the greater, as in the present moment, when he answered Dacia. Till now she had not fully realised his beauty, for to her there was something painful in his usual expression.

“ You shall not be disappointed through me, Miss Singleton.”

“ But you will have to go, then,” she said, her own face beaming with pleasure.

“ Of course I shall, and I daresay shall enjoy it, from the very novelty of the thing to me.”

“ But how did you manage to escape them at Genoa ? You were there, were you not, before coming here ? ”

“ Yes,” he replied, his whole countenance in an instant clouding over ; “ one can generally escape what one dislikes.”

Miss Singleton noticed the change. Perhaps then, after all, balls were peculiarly disagreeable

to him; and if so, why should she persist in her request that he should go?

"I release you from your promise," she said; "for I am sure you hate the thought so much that I should be sorry to be mixed up in your mind with any thing so disagreeable; as, of course, you would lay it all to my door."

He was silent a moment. He evidently had been carried away by thought, and had not even heard what she had said. Then he asked her:

"Will you dance the first dance with me, Miss Singleton?"

He rose as he spoke, as if about to leave. Dacia looked up somewhat surprised.

"No," she said; "if you go, it will be quite punishment enough, without any further inflictions."

"*Nous verrons!* perhaps you won't refuse me at the time if I am very humble? I think, by the way, I have inflicted such a visitation on you that I owe you an apology."

"Indeed it has been a great pleasure to me, for I felt very dull when you came in. Mamma

will not be long before she is home; will you not wait to see her?"

"Not to-day; but if she will permit me to call again soon, I will do so; only if I am troublesome, you must say, 'Not at home.'"

"O, we do not say 'Not at home' in Dunkerque, unless it really happens to be so."

"*A l'Anglaise*, may I shake hands with you?" he said.

Miss Singleton held out her hand, blushing as she did so. The fact of his asking permission made her feel as if she were doing something out of the ordinary rules of society. He looked at her with an expression of interest, and she met his clear eyes bent down on her with a feeling approaching to regret that she might not inquire what the sorrow was that lay so heavily on him, and that never seemed absent from his memory but for a moment at a time.

Sancho seemed loth to leave. He submitted to be patted, and replied to Dacia's kind words by an intelligent look; he never wagged his tail, or he might have resorted to that mode of expressing his satisfaction.

"You are highly favoured, Miss Singleton, I assure you. Sancho's regard is not lightly won; but when once he does take a fancy, he never changes."

"Then, indeed, his regard is worth having," replied Dacia.

It was nearly dark before Miss Singleton was roused from the reverie she was indulging in. Then her mother returned home and upbraided her, as usual: this time on account of the dismal-looking fire she found, instead of a bright blazing one, which, if she did not find, she always complained about.

"I quite forgot the fire," said Dacia; "I did not feel it cold."

"Like your usual selfishness, Dacia: because you did not care for it yourself, it was a matter of indifference to you whether I felt cold or not."

CHAPTER XVI.

TOUT POUR MOI, RIEN POUR TOI.

DECEMBER was drawing to a close. The weather was cold, damp, and foggy, and no place, to those who considered their personal comfort, was more fit to be in at such a season than home. The bare idea of the country or seaside seemed to drive one closer towards the fire. It might be very pleasant when there, but it decidedly appeared ungenial in perspective.

Mrs. Moncrieffe was sitting huddled up in a large arm-chair. She was most unmistakably out of temper, and she looked as if she would have vented it on the furniture if she could, there being no other available object, so overflowing did her anger appear. Presently she heard a double knock,—a sharp, decided rap, the echo of which seemed very familiar to her ear, for she started up and looked in the glass, apparently with dis-

satisfaction at the result, for she began to try and mould her face into a more pleasing look, and then seated herself on the sofa, arranging her dress, setting it off to better advantage than when she was nose and knees together brooding over her grievance. Mr. Robert Reeves was announced. He came forward in a quiet, fatherly manner, saying:

"My dear Mrs. Moncrieffe, how are you to-day?" and then, looking round and seeing the servant was gone, he continued in a very different tone: "What is wrong? You only send for me when you want to make use of me. I thought you could manage your husband yourself; surely you have more influence over him than I have?"

"I can generally make him do as I like; but he says now I sha'n't go; and he talks in that positive way that he does when he means a thing. So I want you to talk to him; you can persuade him I am ill, and want change."

"I do not see how that would attain your object. You want to go to one particular spot, and without your husband."

"Well, never mind what I want; only do you try and manage to get his consent to my leaving town." There was silence for a moment. Mr. Reeves stood looking into the fire, Cecily watching him. Then she rose, and laying her hand lightly on his arm, she said in a pleading tone, "I thought I might depend on you for this; it is not much I am asking."

He took her hand and pressed his lips to it, and then instantly let it drop. Mrs. Moncrieffe hardly expected this, but she put it down as the penalty she paid for gaining her object, for she felt certain now Mr. Reeves could be made do as she desired. She cared little how she tampered with other people's feelings: her own were not likely to suffer, so what did it signify?

"I will do my best, Mrs. Moncrieffe, if you fail yourself; but I do not like it; I do not like the notion of your being with the Countess Langen for such a purpose, and neither her husband nor your own to take care of you. Who is going to be your escort?"

"O, I don't know; some friends of Maria's, I suppose."

Mrs. Moncrieffe blushed as she replied. Mr. Reeves noticed it. But that she had obtained a certain influence over him which he had not the power to shake off, that blush would have made him wash his hands of the whole matter. In his heart—independently of a jealous feeling he could not overcome—he disapproved of the entire affair; but he was in her toils for the moment, and became her tool. She knew that just as well as he did; but it was her policy not to allow him to see she did. He walked up and down the room till Cecily said in a playful tone, “What are you thinking about, and looking so cross at?”

“I am not cross; I am merely thinking about what perhaps you will say does not concern me—your intimacy with Madame Langen. I do not like her, and regret your friendship with her.”

“I cannot think what there is in poor Maria that you all seem to dislike so much. There was that wretched man Henry Marsden used to look as if the ghost of his greatest enemy appeared whenever he saw her; and if she was with me, and he happened to hear it through the servants, he would never come in, only leaving his card

Then James says he doesn't like her; but I am not surprised at that, for he has not the sense to like any thing he ought to like. But I am astonished at you : your taste is always so good, that I fancied you would have admired her excessively. She is very handsome."

"She may be. Nevertheless, I cannot admire her. I wish, Mrs. Moncrieffe, you would give this up; or tell your husband."

"How can you be so foolish as to ask me! If I told James, I might give it up, for I *know* he would not let me go; and I have made up my mind to it, and am determined to have my own way this time."

"When is it you do not get it? You make every one do as you like, even against what they feel to be right, as you are doing with me now."

There was no possibility of replying to this; for, as Mr. Reeves finished speaking, Mrs. Ewart came in.

"Good gracious, Mum, how can you walk such a day as this? I am sure I could not breathe," was her niece's greeting.

"How do you know I did walk, Cis?—How

do you do, Mr. Reeves? I hope Cis is not ill, that I see you here?"

"Well, I am not well, if I am not ill," said Cecily very crossly, being much put out at Mrs. Ewart's appearance at a moment when she had hardly finished talking with her doctor.

"It is the weather, Mrs. Moncrieffe," said Mr. Reeves; "and I think you sit too much in-doors."

"O, if you want me to go out and walk such a day as this, I can't do it. It may be all very well for Mum, and that she likes it; but not for me."

"No, I do not," he replied; "but I think as a rule you should take more exercise. I will say good-bye to you now, and will look in again in the course of a few days.—Good-bye, Mrs. Ewart; you are not going abroad yet?"

"Not immediately," she replied. The moment he was gone she moved over to the chair he had just left by her niece's side. "Cecily, you will think I am always taking you to task," she said; "but I look on you very much in the light of an orphan, with no one to point out to you when and where you are wrong. Your mother, were she a

woman likely to guide you, is absent. You are young, pretty, and married to a foolish young man whose affection for you seems to blind him to every thing else—”

“What in the world is the matter now!” exclaimed her niece, interrupting her. Cecily was crosser than ever by this time; for her aunt had driven Mr. Reeves away before any thing had been definitely arranged, and now she recollected fifty little things she had had to say to him, all of which were of course unsaid.

“Why, the matter is, that I think you are pursuing a path likely to lead to sorrow. You know I have told you more than once, if you don’t do wrong, don’t do wrong-like. Now you are certainly doing the one or the other; and unfortunately to do what bears the appearance of wrong on the face of it, is next thing to actually committing it; for it will surely lead to it.”

“I don’t know what you mean, and I don’t understand you.”

“Why is it I never come here but that I find you sitting alone with some man? It is either some of those miserable foreigners—friends of

Madame Langen—or else it is your doctor. Latterly he has been here oftener than necessary, surely, for you are not ill; so why does he come?”

“To prevent my getting ill, I suppose. Prevention is better than cure.”

“Then, for God’s sake, Cis, act up to that in all things.”

“Such nonsense, Mum! What harm can there be in seeing a man when I like, who is old enough to be my father?”

“Were he old enough to be your grandfather, it would not prevent the world from drawing its own conclusions; and still less is it an excuse as regards himself. A man never thinks himself too old to fall in love; and the younger the woman the greater the danger.”

“You seem to know a great deal about it, Mum.”

“I have lived long enough to do so,” replied Mrs. Ewart quietly, “and also to know that most people find wrong pleasanter than right. The commencement invariably is so; but Cecily, the end has to be thought of. Think what you are

risking; all that is dearest to a woman in life—your good name.”

“I am sure I am doing no such thing.”

“You are, Cecily. As a worm in fruit destroys it imperceptibly, so are you—unconsciously perhaps—destroying your whole future. And what for? To gratify some foolish feeling of vanity, and to appear on a par with your friend the Countess Langen, whose whole employment in life seems to be to attract men to her feet. Cecily, in plain words, it is disreputable for a married woman to go on so.”

“I wish you would not abuse my friend.” Cecily coloured up with anger; she really was fond of her friend, as she called her. “I am sure she looks the very picture of innocence and simplicity.”

“Yes; and that look is as necessary to an intriguing woman as the mask of religion is to a priest. Cecily, will you promise me to give up receiving your foreign friends, or your doctor—I own I somewhat mistrust his honest face, for an honest man has honest purposes—when you are alone. When your husband is at home the whole

world, good or bad, might visit you, and not a breath be raised against you; but not otherwise, as surely as I am sitting here."

"I don't care if there is; I don't care a straw for the world, or the world's opinion. If people don't like to visit me, they may stay away; I have plenty of friends that, no matter what I do, will only be too glad to come."

"Yes; I am afraid to a certain extent you are right. As long as you have a handsome house, can give good dinners, and are living under your husband's protection, you may do much with impunity. As long as society can shut their eyes—if any thing is to be gained by their doing so—they will; but matters seldom continue very long in that tottering state: an end comes; and once fail in keeping a hold on your husband's heart, he will turn from you. And then, Cecily, the world is only too glad to turn round and trample on the woman they have hitherto supported in her wrong."

"Well, Mum, do talk of something else; I hate this sort of thing."

"I suppose I may, Cis; for all the good I am likely to do, I might as well try to turn a lock

without a key as turn you from any line of conduct you choose to adopt. However, to turn the subject,—which is easy,—I heard from Dacia yesterday; your mother is not well.”

“She never is. What is the matter with her?”

“Well, Dacia does not say; but the want of an English doctor is a source of worry to her, and she won’t have the French one; for she says he is sure to kill her altogether. The poor child writes in bad spirits, and is anxious for me to go over there.”

“Why, you are not a doctor; what good can you do?”

“Help Dacia nurse, I suppose. It would doubtless be some comfort to have some one with her.”

“And are you going?”

“I shall wait a little; and if I hear, in answer to the letter I wrote, that your mother is no better, I think I shall go about the middle of next week.”

“It’s horrible weather for a sea voyage.”

“Not pleasant, certainly; but one comfort, it is not long.”

“That just depends. You may be thirty-six hours, if you go direct all the way from London bridge.”

“But then I have no intention of going direct all the way from London bridge; I shall go by Dover and Calais.”

“You know the last time Mrs. Percival came over to England—O, two years ago now—she went back that way, and was thirty-six hours. I wonder she didn’t die; I am sure I should. She could get nothing to take but horrible tea without milk.”

“Well, I should think she would never attempt that way again. Dacia, by the bye, seems to like the Percivals better than any one else in Dunquerque.”

“Does she mention the Consul? I wrote and asked her how they liked him; but she replied, in some vague way, that they saw so little of him she could hardly judge.”

“Some time back she wrote a great deal about him, but not so lately; and in this last letter she does not mention any one at all: it is all about your mother.”

“How strange of Dacia not to have told you what is the matter! She might have written to me, I think.”

“ I daresay she will ; but, at all events, I will let you know the moment I hear again.”

When her aunt left, Mrs. Moncrieffe sat for some time brooding over her imaginary troubles : she was especially vexed at the tone of Mrs. Ewart's remonstrances. She felt she was right, and that knowledge but increased her annoyance. As far as Mr. Reeves was concerned, she did not care a straw ; but as to the world, she was not quite so indifferent as she affirmed. She knew that, whatever her aunt thought, there was no occasion to lecture her on his account ; and if her conscience gave her a prick at all, it was touching Jules de Monléon, whose soft speeches she certainly listened to with some degree of pleasure.

There was very little actual harm in Cecily Moncrieffe. She was too silly and frivolous, and wanting in any great depth of feeling, to err very far ; and had she not fallen into bad hands, she would have passed through life without an episode of any note. But she was impetuous and weak—either unfortunate qualities to possess, and especially if together. Another ill-starred fact connected with her was her husband, weaker perhaps

than herself, yet loving her to folly, whilst she cared no more for him or his opinions and wishes than she would for a worm on the ground. She treated him, indeed, very much in the way that unpleasant-looking thing is treated by humane people: she did not tread on him, but she quietly walked on one side to get out of his way.

With all his love, however, he was injudicious in his mode of acting towards her in the extreme. He would indulge her in the most foolish and frivolous fancies, that is, if it entailed his being included in whatever it might be; but if she wanted any thing apart from him, he opposed it with an obstinacy that helped far to drive one of his wife's disposition to be guilty of enormities, which, however, as he knew nothing of as yet, had in no way caused him annoyance or vexation. He would as soon have believed Cecily capable of committing any real wrong as he would have imagined it possible for himself to be untrue, even in thought, to her. If she asked him for an opera-box for the season, he managed to let her have it, though by doing so he was compelled to forego some personal amusement; but if she asked him,

as she had now done, to let her go and spend a few days at Tunbridge Wells with the Countess Langen, he refused directly, simply because, in granting her the one request, it did not take her from him; in granting her the other, it would.

She was still moping when her husband came in.

"Why, Cis, it's pitch dark in here! What are you about? are you sleeping? Why don't you have candles?"

"Because I don't want them."

"What's the matter with you?"

"I am very ill."

"Ill, my darling! What is it?"

"There—don't touch me; that won't make me better," she said, as her husband went up to her and laid his hand on her head.

"You're cross, Cis; you're not ill."

"Well, you are enough to provoke any one into being cross."

"Why, what have I done? I am sure I never wish to make you cross."

"Then why don't you let me go to Tunbridge Wells?"

“ O, is that old grievance coming up again? What’s the good of saying any more about it?”

“ Because I shall say on and on till you are tired out.”

“ But, Cis, I don’t like that Countess Langen. If you want to go out of town for a few days, I will take you any where you like; though I am sure I can’t conceive how you should wish to leave home at such a time of year and in such weather.”

“ I don’t want to go with you; I want to go by myself; though I begin to think that, instead of not liking Maria Langen, you are in love with her, and so don’t want me to be with her.”

“ Cecily, how can you talk to me in that manner?”

James Moncrieffe felt terribly hurt at his wife’s words; he loved her too well not to be pained at them.

Cecily made no reply, and after a minute her husband said:

“ You may go, Cecily, if you like, to any place you choose, and alone; but with regard to Madame Langen, Henry Marsden told me quite enough—

little as it was—to make me feel convinced she is no fit companion for my wife.”

“O, Henry Marsden and rubbish! Then I may go? Thank you, James. You are a dear good fellow!”

And she put up her pretty face for her husband to kiss, in token of thanks for his concession. He accepted the invitation readily, and, pushing her hair off her forehead, looked into her face as well as the dim light of the fire admitted of, and said:

“You generally make me do as you choose, Cis; but I should have been happier if you had not made such a request. I should have enjoyed being with you, even with all the discomfort of an hotel to put up with, instead of all the comforts we have at home.”

“Well but, James, you will be so glad to have me back again, that the pleasure of seeing me after being away will be ten times more than the dulness you will feel during my absence. Besides, you can dine at your club every day; and you know you like that.”

“You know I like no such thing. The only

time I ever pretend to like it is when you—as you have done lately—go and dine with Madame Langen, and leave me either to dine at my club, or dine at home alone, which I certainly so hate, that a coffee-house dinner, or none at all, would be preferable.”

“Well, I won’t dine out once before I go; and I won’t go till next week; and I will only stay a week away.”

“No thanks to you that you won’t dine out before that, as there is no one in town just now that would dream of asking you without me.”

“Now, James, I never say any thing or do any thing to try and please you, but what you see some fault in it. If I chose, I could dine out in fifty places without you.”

“Well, never mind that; that has nothing to do with your wishing to go away without me; and really——”

“Well, James, you have promised me I shall go; so there’s an end of it. I am sure it must be time to dress for dinner.”

And Mrs. Moncrieffe, fearing a withdrawal of the permission she had extracted with what she

considered so much difficulty, went up to her room in the best humour and best spirits possible, humming the air of "Rien pour moi, tout pour toi." Her husband, who knew the song well, thought it would be more applicable to himself if she reversed it; and I don't think he was far wrong.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHATTERING CHORLEY'S CHATTERINGS.

MRS. SINGLETON was really very far from well. She had gone one day as far as the *restaurant* on the pier, to have a *friture* luncheon. It was one of the fashionable resorts of Dunkerque, and parties of ten or twelve were formed to go there, and eat all kinds of fish dressed in all kinds of ways; a mild—very mild—kind of Greenwich feast. And here Mrs. Singleton caught a violent cold. The season was not a fit one for such expeditions; but season rarely influenced them. Mrs. Singleton was a bad subject for a cold—not that one often meets with a good one—but she was especially suffering when so attacked; and then, of course, she instantly wanted a doctor.

It was a perfect marvel to Dacia how she had gone on so many months without calling in a medical man; but the dreaded idea of being in

the hands of a French doctor, and moreover one that, till he came to practise in Dunkerque, had never had other patients but such as he found in the camp or the hospital, had up to this prevented her calling in his assistance. She had, however, till now never required it, as, beyond her usual ailments, she had had nothing the matter with her; indeed her health had been far better than for many years past.

For several days there appeared no other symptoms than those of an ordinary cold in the head; but now she was feverish, and complained of pains in her head and a difficulty in swallowing. She was in bed, restless and sleepless; Dacia was all patience and gentleness, for she saw this time that, whatever amount of fancy there might be, there was enough reality to excuse any irritability of temper. She was sitting by her mother's bedside, and Maxwell standing by the window—which looked into a narrow courtyard—pinching up the border of a pretty-looking cap trimmed with lace and violet ribbon, which, when ready, was to decorate her mistress' head.

“Mamma, do let me send for Monsieur Le-

fèvre; I am sure he will give you something that will relieve that tightness on your chest."

"How can a man, who never did any thing but bind up wounds, or cut off men's legs and arms, know what is fit for a woman who is ill? I wonder, Dacia, you have not more sense than to propose such a thing!"

"But, mamma, surely soldiers sometimes are ill, independently of wounds; and I should think colds would be a very common ailment amongst them, when you remember how exposed they are."

"Just the reason that if they had them no attention would be paid them. No; I must bear my sufferings, and take my chance about getting well; which it is more than probable I shall never do."

"Do not talk like that, mamma; what is there to prevent your getting well? Only, if you would but consent to see the doctor, you would get well as quickly again."

"Give me a little of that lemonade, Dacia, and don't talk to me again of the French doctor."

Dacia, from amidst a quantity of bottles and boxes of jujubes and other lozenges, took the glass

containing the lemonade and gave it her mother. She drank it all with the greedy thirstiness of fever.

“I must have some more made,” she said.

Miss Singleton left the room to tell Babette she must fetch some lemons at once, and let her know when they were there. Hearing voices within, she paused at the kitchen-door. She fancied some of the market-people were there with their goods. She distinguished Babette’s voice saying:

“Allez-vous en! allez-vous en! Si Madame sache que vous êtes ici, elle me fichera à la porte. Je n’ose pas vous voir ici.”

There was a murmured reply, but Dacia did not wait longer. Thinking some tiresome importunate person was with Babette, she returned to her mother’s room to desire Maxwell to give the necessary order. But Maxwell was in the midst of adorning Mrs. Singleton and arranging her bed-toilette; it was ten minutes at least before this was completed; and then, no sooner was that over than she required her maid to air a pocket-handkerchief, and then to tuck up a sleeve that would

come inconveniently long over her hand; so at last Dacia thought it would be wiser to go herself once more, and probably by that time whoever was there would be gone. She was right; no one was there but Babette—but Babette in tears.

“Who was here just now, Babette? What, you are crying! What is the matter?”

“O, mademoiselle, did you see who was here? Indeed, indeed, I could not help it,” said the girl in great distress.

“I did not see any one, Babette; I only heard you telling some one to go; and as I supposed some of the market-people were with you, I did not come in.”

“Yes, mademoiselle, so it was!” Babette was gaining courage.

“But, then, why are you crying?”

“I don’t know, mademoiselle,—we all cry sometimes, don’t we?”

“Not without a cause.”

“Ah, mademoiselle, who is there that has not a cause? unless it is yourself, who are as good as you are beautiful, and all the world loving you!”

"I don't know much about that, Babette; I am not at all sure that that would be a talisman against sorrow. However, if you won't tell me what is grieving you, I can't help it; only if there is any thing I can do for you, if you are in trouble, I will."

For a moment it crossed poor Babette's distressed mind that it would be a great relief to confide her sorrows to her young mistress; but the recollection of what might—what must—be the consequences, flashed across her in time to keep her silent. She shook her head, and said she had nothing to tell. Miss Singleton then having given her the orders about the lemons, returned to her mother's room.

It was dull work for Dacia, sitting—with the exception of short intervals—all day long in her mother's room, with the blinds drawn down to moderate the light, and listening to her constant fault-finding and lamentations. Still she did not complain, though she hailed any little break in the monotony of her life with pleasure. A fortnight had passed in this way, and Mrs. Singleton was, of necessity, getting daily weaker; for she

could not be under the influence of low fever without its visibly telling on her; and so Dacia, failing to persuade her mother to call in the doctor, had—as she always had done from her childhood when in any dilemma—fallen back on her aunt. Mrs. Ewart's reply had now just arrived, and was brought in by Babette.

"It's from Mum," exclaimed Dacia joyfully. "How good of her to write to me so quickly!"

"I see nothing good in it," said her mother; "it is the least she could do, if you told her how ill I am. Is there only one letter—none from Cecily?"

"No, only one. But then Cis could not have replied yet; I daresay we shall hear from her to-morrow."

"Well, read your aunt's letter. What does she say?"

Dacia read it. The cream of it was, if Mrs. Singleton was not better, she would go over to them in the course of a few days. Though in her heart Mrs. Singleton had no real affection for her sister-in-law, she was, nevertheless, fully alive to her good qualities. The very fact of her never

giving in to her in her weak fancies had gone far to insure her esteem. But were that not so, one is very apt, when ill and away from home, with none but acquaintances to fall back on in case of need, to set a higher value on those that are not only relations, but that take a heartfelt interest in all concerning us. This Mrs. Singleton knew Mrs. Ewart did; thus she desired Dacia to write immediately, and beg her aunt to come as soon as possible.

Dacia, who did not see through or understand the feelings that prompted her mother to grasp at the hand held out to her,—and which, though Mrs. Ewart had many a time and oft been equally prompt in offering, had invariably been rejected, or if accepted, it was merely done to please her daughter,—felt more uneasiness as to her mother's state than she had done before; and consequently the tone of her letter to her aunt bore the impress of anxiety, and left the idea in Mrs. Ewart's mind that Mrs. Singleton was more seriously ill than was actually the case.

Miss Singleton was writing in the drawing-room, when Mr. Way was announced. She re-

ceived him, as she always did, with a chilling politeness.

"I called, Miss Singleton, because I heard your mamma was very ill; and you know, in my capacity as clergyman here, it is my duty to offer my services to the sick, if they are disposed to receive them. Do you think Mrs. Singleton would like to see me?"

"I do not think she would; but I am sure she would desire me to thank you for your offer. My mother has not yet seen a medical man; so that I hardly think she is in a state necessary to seek a clergyman's aid."

"But, Miss Singleton, however full of health the body may be, the soul may be ill, and need tending."

Such words from the lips of such a man made Dacia sick. She longed to tell him to take the beam out of his own eye before he talked of other people's motes.

"Perhaps so. I never judge on such points for others."

How she wished the big brute would go! However, Miss Chorley appeared: that was better

than being longer left *tête-à-tête* with him. Dacia never welcomed Chattering Chorley before as she did now.

"And how is poor dear Mrs. Singleton?" said Miss Chorley, smiling.

"There is no improvement; and I hardly see how there can be, as long as she persists in refusing to have the only advice that she can get."

"And really Lefèvre is very clever—very clever indeed," replied Miss Chorley.

"Well, for my part," said Mr. Way, "I think Mrs. Singleton is right. How can a Frenchman understand an English constitution! I would not trust myself in his hands."

"Ah! but, Mr. Way, you know you have a personal dislike to him; and I suppose you think he might not take proper care of you. You see, I know all your secrets!" said Miss Chorley, perfectly radiant.

Her smile was apparently too much for the big man to bear; for he got up, saying to Dacia, without taking any notice of Miss Chorley's remark, "If I can be of no use, Miss Singleton, I will wish you good morning. I am afraid

Mrs. Singleton will be forced to send for me, if she does not send for a doctor; though, as I said before, I don't recommend Lefèvre—he's an ass; but there's a very clever fellow, a German,—and their constitutions are more like ours,—living at Cassel. His name is Friedleben. A lovely spot, by the way, Cassel. Have you ever been there, Miss Singleton?"

"No, never."

"Ah, well, you must go. Miss Chorley can tell you all about it. She knows all about every thing—don't you, Miss Chorley? Good-bye, good-bye." And his body swayed to and fro as he walked out of the room, looking more like a prize-fighter than a clergyman.

"Yes, I should think I could tell you about Cassel; and even more than Mr. Way fancies, or would like either," said Miss Chorley with a knowing look.

"Why does Mr. Way so dislike Monsieur Lefèvre?"

"O, my dear, it's a shocking story. Of course I don't know if it is really true; but every one believes it is. They say, you know, that there

was a poor girl—one of the lace-makers of Cassel—who used to come over here to sell her lace, which they make there, you know, exactly like Valencienne, only I think it is better—and she—but I don't think it is a fit story to tell you. You see, you are very young, and I daresay you don't know much of the wickedness that goes on in the world; and yet there's plenty of it, dear."

Miss Chorley smiled, as if the thought was a cheery one.

"But I don't see what that has to do with the doctor."

"Why, they say the parson went to the doctor about this girl, and that Lefèvre turned him out of the house; and he tells every one *le ministre anglais* is a *faquin*, a *coquin*, and that he would not attend him if he offered him a napoleon a visit!"

"Well, then, it is not so difficult to understand why he says he would not send for him if he required a doctor," said Dacia.

"But I came to tell you some news," said Miss Chorley, bobbing up on her chair, and making herself more comfortable. "What do

you think?—the day for the ball is fixed at last!"

"Is it?" said Dacia, her great blue eyes sparkling with pleasure, and a slight flush mounting to her cheeks.

"Yes; and when do you think it is to be? Very soon; and it need be, after the way it has constantly been put off. The last day of the year! Won't that be charming, to dance the old year out and the new year in?"

"I don't much care for that," said Miss Singleton; "to dance out any day and dance in a new one would be equally pleasant. It is the dancing I like."

"I suppose you have been to loads and loads of balls? I know some friends of mine who live in London go sometimes to two and three in one night."

"O dear, no, I have not. I never lived in London, and I have only been to two in the country. Two country balls; and there was a year's interval between them. Last year, when it took place, poor papa was very ill, and of course we did not go. Perhaps, if I had been to

a great many, I should not care so much about them."

"It is to be at the Hôtel de Ville, and a committee has been formed to settle all about it. Ladies are all to receive invitations, and the gentlemen subscribe to pay all the expenses, excepting the Consul, because you know it is given for him. It is very nice for *us*, dear, isn't it? it will cost us nothing! And all the invitations are to be printed on embossed paper, and it's to be the loveliest thing altogether that ever was. I am only sorry it is not in honour of Mr. Ivor Campbell, instead of that demure gloomy Mr. Mostyn."

"But who in the world is Mr. Ivor Campbell; for no one seems to know any thing about him?"

"Well, he is a great friend of Mrs. Merivale's son, and she says, such a delightful, charming, gay young man, who would have kept us in a constant round of amusement, always proposing something new to make one's life pass happily. But I have always heard those people at the Foreign Office consult their advantage at the expense of other people's likings. They must be a horrid selfish set! Why, this place is quite dismal enough

without their sending us a man whose face is enough to give one a fit of the blues even to look at."

"He does look sad at times," said Dacia, remembering how differently he could look.

"At times! My dear, he always looks the same. I don't think he could smile if he tried. You know there are all sorts of stories about him. I have heard no end."

"Have you—what have you heard?"

Usually Dacia was not given to encourage Chattering Chorley in her chatterings; but possibly, after the dull life she had been leading lately, she was glad to hear any gossip chance threw in her way.

"Well, some say he was attached to an Italian lady, the wife of one of the ambassadors at Turin, and because she was married, he broke his heart."

Dacia laughed. The story was too absurd. "I do not think that can be true," she said; "Mr. Mostyn seems a sensible man, and that would be more like a madman's act."

"Very often those sensible-looking men are

terrible fools about women ; besides, in these days, fashion is very peculiar about married women—they manage to change their husbands when it suits them ; that is in England, you know. Here, once you are married, it is for ever.”

“I thought it was the same in England ; you must be making some mistake, Miss Chorley !” said Dacia, utterly at a loss to understand what Miss Chorley meant, and a picture of Cecily instantly taking advantage of the new fashion presenting itself to her mind.

“No, my dear, no mistake ; it is true enough. Well, then, another story is, that it was an English girl, and she jilted him, and ran away with a Dane or a Swede ; at all events, a man who belonged to one of those embassies.”

“That sounds more likely. Poor fellow ! It must any way have been a great sorrow to have left the stamp on his face that it has.”

“Well, I think if that is the true story, he is very silly, for he ought to be excessively glad to have escaped marrying such a girl ; she never would have made him happy. But I am afraid I am keeping you from your mamma. I do not like

to ask to see her, as perhaps she would not care to see me."

"I hardly think she is well enough," said Dacia, who always could invent a kindly excuse when necessary, though this time it was the simple truth.

"Will you give my love to her, and tell her how sorry I am she continues so poorly; and will you give her these from me?" And good-natured Chorley drew out a couple of fine Maltese oranges. "Minnie Watson brought them to me, and I thought they would be so nice for your mamma."

"How kind of you to think of bringing them! I am sure mamma will enjoy them, for she drinks such a quantity of lemonade; and she has once or twice asked for oranges, but as yet I have found none that were not too sour."

"Good-bye, dear, good-bye; I will come again soon, if you will let me, and tell you all that is going on about the ball, though you will hear of it from the Percivals. I do wish your mamma would see Lefèvre."

And off the little woman trotted. Then Dacia went with the oranges to her mother's room. Mrs.

Singleton was asleep, so Dacia placed them on the table by her bed-side, and in an under-tone told Maxwell, who was always there when she was absent, that it looked so fine and bright, she thought she would take the opportunity whilst her mother was asleep of going for a walk."

"I am sure, miss, it is very improper for you to be walking about by yourself in the way you do. I wonder what the people at Christchurch would think if they knew Miss Singleton was brought to that!"

"Why, Maxwell, what nonsense you talk! I always went out alone at Christchurch."

"Yes, miss, in the village, but not in the town."

"But here every one walks alone. I have often met Miss Thomas and Miss Watson and Mdlle. Hervieu by themselves."

"O, it may be very well for that lot, but not for my mistress' daughter."

"Any way, I will go now. I shall enjoy a walk. I will go to the end of the pier and back."

"What, at this hour, and in that racketting omnibus? That's a pretty sort of carriage to see

you in! O dear, O dear, that we ever came to this place! Here's what has come of it; my mistress ill—and really ill too—and you driving about in omnibuses and walking about the town by yourself!”

“Well, Maxwell, my aunt will be here, I hope, next week,” replied Dacia. “I suppose you will be very glad to see her.”

“Indeed I shall, miss; more glad than I have ever been yet.”

Miss Singleton, however, had no intention of going down to the pier in the omnibus. She thought the exercise of walking would do her much more good; and so wrapping herself well up, she started off at a brisk pace. As she passed by the end of the Rue du Sud, she saw the British arms over the Consul's house, looking very bright, having lately been regilt. This brought her thoughts back to Chattering Chorley's gossip about Mr. Mostyn; and then a sudden thought flashed across her—was he the friend Henry Marsden had spoken of as the one whom the Countess Langen had injured? If so, how strange, how singular it seemed that Henry Marsden should take him to

her sister's, where he might have met her! Then she wondered what Count Langen was like, that he had succeeded in gaining her affections away from one that she fancied must surely have been worthy of any woman's love. What we like ourselves, we think every one else must like also.

It was a long way to the end of the pier; but Dacia reached it, hardly conscious of having done so, so buried in thought had she been; and then, when she found the end was reached, she looked up—there was a shadow between her and the great broad open sea—Sancho and his master were standing before her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CROSSING THE DUNES.

A PLEASED smile of recognition was visible on both Dacia Singleton's and Hugh Mostyn's faces as they met on this desolate spot. It was seldom, indeed, that any one walked to the extreme end of the unusually long narrow pier at Dunkerque, which jutted so far into the sea, that on turning round and looking towards the town, which loomed in the distance, one might fancy oneself far away out at sea.

They shook hands now *à l'Anglaise*; no permission was asked; it seemed quite natural to them now, and was done as a matter of course whenever they met.

"Who would have thought of seeing Miss Singleton at such a spot—and at such an hour I might add, for it will soon be twilight; and between twilight and darkness there is not much

time. Sancho saw you, a long way off, and he would have bounded off to greet you, had I not held him back."

"Why did you? Dear old Sancho!" and she stooped down to caress the dog; his long nose was resting against her knee, as if placed there expecting to be petted. Presently she looked round; it appeared already as if there was a dimness over the town. "I came here almost without knowing it; I certainly should not have come so far, had I been thinking what I was about; however, the best thing for me to do is to walk back as quickly as I came."

"As we must walk the same way, you will perhaps allow me to see you home; therefore, if you are inclined to gaze a few minutes longer at this desolate prospect, you can indulge yourself."

There was a touch of contempt in his tone that made Miss Singleton look up. Did he feel contempt for her, the sea, or what? Any way, it did not please her; and she replied with somewhat unnecessary haughtiness:

"I will not trouble you to see me home; I can

return alone, thank you. I am going to remain here a little longer."

And with a slight bend of her head and a proud look in her beautiful face, she moved as far as she could from where they were standing, and sat down on the uncomfortable narrow ledge intended for a seat. Sancho instantly jumped up, and seated himself beside her; he evidently intended being her defender, if permitted. He looked very absurd, and could hardly sit steadily.

"No wonder that girl jilted him," she thought in her anger, "if he made himself as disagreeable to her as it clearly is in his power to be." Under her momentary annoyance, she quite forgot her previous ideas on the subject.

"I will let that proud girl find out she had better have accepted my offer; she will be sorry enough she did not when she reaches the harbour, and has to pass through groups of sailors, tipsy or insolent as the case may be."

So thought Hugh Mostyn, as he raised his hat and walked slowly away, calling his dog after him. But Sancho never moved; he gave one sharp bark, and remained bolt upright; his master

turned round; he understood the dog perfectly, but he had no more intention of giving in to him than to the young lady: he was about again to call him, when he saw Dacia lay her cheek against the dog's head, and then say, "Go off, Sancho; go, old dog!" and reluctantly and slowly did he leap down and walk away with sedate steps after Hugh.

They had not gone far when Mostyn ventured to look round; surely not with a notion that Miss Singleton had repented of her decision; for if so, he knew very little about her disposition; however, if he did, he was quickly disabused of the idea; for she was standing up, her elbow resting on the top of a wooden post, and her cheek resting against her hand. The great, red, setting sun cast a glow over her, giving an auburn tinge to her beautiful golden-coloured hair, which the wind, now somewhat rough, had blown away from her face.

Hugh Mostyn, if a stern, hard man, was a man, and he could not look at that tall, graceful girl and remain uninfluenced by her beauty. He reproached himself for what he now chose to con-

sider the uncourteous tone he had spoken to her in, and was more than half-resolved, and wholly inclined, to go back to her and make peace.

“You were right, Sancho, I ought not to have left her; but having done so, I won’t go back; she shall not have the pleasure of feeling she has gained a victory over me; she should have accepted my offer when I made it.”

But he determined, nevertheless, to linger about the harbour, and watch her unseen safely to her home.

It is marvellous what effect beauty will have on a man’s manner. An act that he would think quite commonplace, and nothing about, towards a plain person, he will persuade himself is one wanting in courtesy to a woman that is handsome. Beauty decidedly insures civility. There is no gift in nature so valuable to a woman as good looks. It renders her life as happy again as it would otherwise be. She is sought after, she is petted and caressed, she is fêted; she is spared, generally, all jealous feelings; go where she will she is welcome, for if she can do nothing else she can adorn every place she is in. A beautiful

woman is a pleasant sight even to her own sex ; for though they somehow never care to acknowledge beauty in one another, yet they love to see it none the less ; and if it happens to belong to one not in their own sphere, they can pay tribute to it as well as they can to a painting or statue, that in no way deteriorates from, or interferes with, their own charms.

Dacia's resolution to show her independence led her into committing a great act of folly. She remained where she was till the sun had set. She watched it sinking lower and lower, till it appeared to pass into the sea, and was hidden entirely. Then the wind blew higher and bleakly, with winter sharpness ; and bitterly cold as she began to feel, and longing to move that she might gain some warmth, she thought Hugh Mostyn could barely be home ; and to insure no further meeting, she wished to give him time to reach his own house. However, her pride failed to keep her from approaching freezing-point ; besides, the night had drawn on much faster than she imagined. It looked much lighter out at sea ; but now that she turned her face towards the land,

she saw it would be quite dark before she could reach home ; and there were black clouds gathered over the town foretelling a storm.

She walked on very rapidly, her heart beating from nervousness. It was not that she saw any one, but that she feared seeing some one. What should she do, in that lone far-away place, if she met any one of the hundreds that she knew were to be found in every town, who might rob her, or, worse still, insult her? As long, however, as she saw nothing, and heard nothing but the roar of the sea, which every moment seemed to become louder and more furious, she walked on thankful enough.

She had passed the restaurant, and was now on the carriage-road. There was still nearly a quarter of a mile of the wooden-paved way to go before she came to the first drawbridge, and she kept looking anxiously right and left, as she went quickly on, in the dread of seeing some one lurking about. How she wished now for the rejected protection of Hugh Mostyn !—though the chances are, had he at that moment appeared, the sight of him would have engendered sufficient courage

to make her again refuse. She crossed the draw-bridge at last, and went on more bravely for a few moments, when she came to the second one, on the other side of which is the covered road or archway leading at once to the harbour. Looking through that dark passage, her courage failed her. She paused a moment, and hearing men's voices within it, talking in loud quarrelsome tones, she turned back, running as fast as fear enabled her to do, till she recrossed the first bridge, and found herself once more in a direct line for the pier.

She now stood still a moment to consider what she should do. Daylight was gone, and twilight would not hold out very much longer. There was no use now in regretting what she had done. She saw the folly of it, and yet even at that moment it seemed as if the folly had consisted only in her having gone alone at all to such a distance, not her having refused Mr. Mostyn's company home. She was certain she was quite right in having done that. Unknown to herself, her greatest vexation arose through his accepting her refusal. She now thought whether it would not be advisable to wait

patiently till the man came who lighted the lamps on the bridge, and then ask him to see her safely past the harbour. Then she recollected how uneasy her mother would be; how uneasy, no doubt, she was already. When out alone on previous occasions, her absence had never exceeded an hour, and now fully two had elapsed, if not more, since she left home.

Suddenly she remembered a way she could get home by going over the sands, across the Dunes, and so skirting the town and entering it by the opposite end. She did not give herself a moment to think of the difficulties she might have to encounter; so as she encountered no human ones, of which she certainly ran very little risk at that hour, she did not care; therefore the instant she recollected the road, she went on her way till she came to some steps, which, with a little difficulty, she descended, and then she found herself on the hard firm sand. She walked on briskly now, feeling safe, and beginning almost to enjoy her solitude.

But this was not to last long. In a few minutes she had to turn to the right, and in this

manner faced the wind, which blew the loose sand down from the Dunes, and beat it sharply against her face. She put up her parasol to shelter herself from it a little, and it sounded like a shower of fine rain rattling against it; but it was a wild night, and even that protection she had to deny herself; the wind was too strong to admit of her holding it up for more than a few seconds. She now had to leave the beach sand, and she soon began to feel the difference. The other, where the sea never reached, was soft and loose, and her feet sank in it at every step; besides, she had now to ascend the Dunes, those sandhills that border this part of the French coast, which, together with the yielding ground and the patches of hard stiff rush-grass that grew about in tufts, proved any thing but an easy or pleasant walk.

She mastered the difficulty, however, after a little; and right glad was she to find herself at the top of the ascent. It was up and down work for a long distance, but all comparatively easy to what she had just accomplished. She was very tired and very weary, and but for the lateness would have rested, for she had no fear now. It

was not solitude she feared. The sea was no longer an all-absorbing sound; she was gradually leaving the echo of its wild roar in the distance. From the undulation of the sandhills she was no longer so exposed to the cold blast of the wind; but it looked terribly wild and desolate. Dacia, without feeling fear, yet heartily wished herself at home. She thought of what Maxwell had said to her on coming out; she smiled as she thought what she would say if she could see her in that desert waste.

At that moment something seemed to rise up before her—a large dark mass. It was too far off for her at the first glance to distinguish what it was. A feeling of awe—hardly as yet to be called fright—crept over her. She involuntarily stood still. What was it, or who was it, in that wild weird spot at such an hour? It bore the form of a man—that Dacia soon discovered; but whether a living one or the spirit of a dead one, she may be forgiven at such a moment for questioning. I doubt if she would have felt half the terror she did feel when she not only discovered that it was flesh and blood, but also who it was, as she would

have done had it passed away from her into space.

"Ah, who have we here? The spirit of the winds in the form of a woman!"

The words were spoken in bad and ill-pronounced French, and the speaker then attempted to take Miss Singleton's hand; but she drew back suddenly, and exclaimed,

"Mr. Way, you cannot have recognised me; I am Miss Singleton."

"By George, so it is! Miss Singleton! Here's a piece of luck. I can pay that proud disdainful girl off now." He muttered these words to himself; and then, in a louder tone, he said to her, "Well, no, I didn't recognise you. I could hardly have expected to meet Miss Singleton in this place and at this hour."

"As little, no doubt, as I expected to meet Mr. Way, or most decidedly I should not have come. Allow me to pass. Good evening."

"No, no; not so fast, young lady. As your spiritual guide, I cannot permit you to go without first ascertaining your reasons for being here. This is not a spot nor an hour that a young

lady with charms like yours chooses for a promenade, unless there is some cause to induce her."

Dacia drew her tall slight girlish figure up to its full height, and, notwithstanding the darkness, there was light enough for Mr. Way to notice the look of anger and indignation that flashed from her usually soft eyes.

"How dare you insult me in this manner! Let me pass immediately!"

But for Miss Singleton to pass the parson, unless the parson chose to let her, was as impossible as for an Italian greyhound successfully to compete with a mastiff. Mr. Way laid his large hand upon Dacia's arm and said: "I have you here, and I won't let you go till you tell me what brought you this way."

The poor girl shrunk from the touch of that hand as she would from the plague. She was beginning to be afraid. She felt all the strong antipathy she had entertained for Mr. Way from the first moment she ever saw him come upon her with double intensity; and to get away from him, she complied with his request. She told him of her having lingered at the pier-end till late, and

then her fear of passing the archway. She told him all ; but carefully avoided Mostyn's name.

His only reply was a loud, rough, derisive laugh—a laugh that made poor Dacia tremble from head to foot—but that laugh saved her. She little thought at the moment what she would have to owe to it ; she never knew what evil she may have escaped in consequence.

“Let me go, Mr. Way ! my mother will be uneasy at my long absence.”

She spoke less commandingly now ; she was willing to ask in a more gentle tone, if she could succeed thereby in her object.

“And do you think I believe that cock-and-bull story of yours ? Ha, ha, ha ! You must take me for a precious greenhorn. But I don't want to spoil your sport, my pretty one ; so if you will give me a kiss, I will let you go.”

As he spoke he made an attempt to put his arm round her, but Dacia bounded on one side before he had touched her, and gave a short, sharp, piercing scream. Mr. Way was again close by her, and was again about to attempt to draw her towards him, when she saw the figure of

another man appear, and in a second Mr. Way hurled, by a well-directed blow, to some paces off; then she felt a singing in her ears, and remembered no more till she found herself in a small hut, belonging to one of the coast-guardsmen, then out on duty, with Mostyn standing over her, and Sancho's cold nose resting on her hand.

It was strange to notice the contrast of their two faces—we might say the three. Hugh looked cold, proud, stern, and unrelenting. . Dacia, with all pride and all fear gone, raised her eyes to her preserver with a grateful yet pleading expression. The dog had a common-sense look about him, that for the moment was certainly wanting in the other two. He seemed perfectly satisfied, and doubtless felt the truth of the saying that all is well that ends well. Gratitude was Dacia's first sensation on her return to consciousness. She felt no surprise in seeing Mostyn beside her; she knew it was his hand saved her; but she did feel surprised at seeing the place she was in. The only light in the hut was from a wood fire, which Mostyn had put together, and which gave out enough light to see around that small place.

"If you are sufficiently rested, Miss Singleton, it will be as well for you to return home." Hugh spoke in a hard tone; there was no sympathy in it, and Dacia felt pained, but she knew not why.

"Where am I, and how did I come here?"

"You are in a small cottage or hut on the Dunes. How you came *there* you best know, for I found you within a few yards of this place."

He stood with his arms folded, and a look of scorn on his handsome face. Could he have doubted Dacia? Hardly. Yet so disposed was he to misjudge all women, that it had almost become an impossibility with him not to impute to them some evil motive for the apparently most innocent actions.

Dacia was deeply hurt at his tone. It was natural, she thought, that he should feel vexed at her obstinacy in refusing his escort when first proffered; but she could not understand it causing him to speak so coldly and harshly now. She felt perplexed as to how he had found her; and though she was rather afraid of asking him, her curiosity got the better of her fear, and she put the question.

“Another time will do to answer you, Miss Singleton,” was his only reply.

There was no moving that cold stern man. He was the first being in life that had ever aroused a feeling of fear in Dacia Singleton—not the fear arising from cowardice; but she felt afraid of him as one is sometimes apt to feel towards those we consider in all respects our superiors. His timely aid in the moment of danger had insured her everlasting gratitude; and a feeling of regret passed through her, as she looked up at him, and thought that if he would but let her, she should so like to pour forth to him her heartfelt thanks; but she had not the courage. She felt certain he would instantly silence her by some cold or perhaps sarcastic retort. She pressed her hand wearily over her forehead, and pushed her waving hair as far off her brow as she could.

“You seem tired,” he said, a little more gently.

“I am tired,” she replied, raising her great blue eyes slowly; but she dropped them suddenly, for she felt that tears were filling them, and she would not let him see her weakness. The long

walk and the intense fright she had suffered had been too much for her. "But I am ready to go. You will go with me?"

He did not reply. Had he spoken his thoughts, he would have said: "You only ask that for the purpose of saying something. You know I must go with you."

He, however, took up his hat from off a wooden box on which it had been standing, and held it in his hand till she chose to rise. When she did so, it was with some difficulty; she felt stiff from head to foot.

Mostyn offered her no help, but when she was ready, he opened the door. Sancho was the last to go out; he seemed reluctant to move. As was his habit when he objected to any thing, he sat on his hind legs bolt upright, and with a determined quiet look in his face, as much as to say, "I don't approve of this proceeding."

It was pitch dark. The tide, which had risen and was now full, was roaring like thunder; the wind blew with increased intensity, and terribly, bitterly cold. It was a frightfully wild night, and it was not without a fervent wish that he had his

charge safely under her mother's roof that Hugh Mostyn started with Dacia over the sand-hills.

It was with difficulty poor Dacia kept herself on her feet ; but notwithstanding her danger of falling or slipping down a sand-bank, she could not divest herself of the terror that took possession of her the moment she left the hut that they might again meet Mr. Way. It was a silly fear, but none the less painful to endure. She said something about it to her companion, but he did not hear her : it required speaking loud in such a storm, if the speaker wished to be heard ; but Dacia thought he did not choose to answer, so she was silent again.

"It is a long walk, Miss Singleton, and I am afraid you will have to go the whole way on foot. We shall not find any conveyance at the port at this hour," he said presently, and speaking distinctly and clearly ; besides, he was close to her.

"Are we going back by the port ?" she asked, in the same tone.

"Yes, it is a third the distance to what we should have to make if we went round."

"But the tide will be up. How shall we pass ?"

"O, easily. The tide does not come to the foot of the hills, and we shall turn off short to the left the moment we reach the base, and skirt them closely till we reach the steps leading up to the pier."

Dacia said no more in opposition. She was willing and contented to leave herself to Hugh's guidance; so on they went, though but slowly. It was terrible to be walking over such ground in utter darkness, and nothing but the lighthouse to guide them as to the direction they were to take. Neither had spoken for some time, when suddenly Miss Singleton called out for help. She had slipped down, owing to a large hole being dug in the sand; and walking on without seeing an inch before her, she had put her foot into it. It was a minute at least before Mostyn found the spot where she was, for he was walking some few paces ahead of her, and then his hand came in contact with her face; however, he easily helped her out, and then advised her taking his arm. She did so thankfully, and then walked on with more confidence. It took them fully half an hour before they reached the last range of sand-hills,

and then it was really a difficult matter to make the descent. It is a very different thing to climb up the side of a sand-hill in broad daylight, when you can scramble up by the aid of different holes and rush-grass, to descending it on a black stormy night, when holes prove more dangerous than helpful, and rush-grass considerably in the way. Presently they heard Sancho barking at the foot of the hills—not angrily, but steadily and continuously.

“I will go first,” said Mostyn; “and if you will rest your hand on my arm, I think I can guide you safely down.” So they began the descent. “I wonder what is the matter with Sancho; he does not bark for nothing.”

“He is not far from us now,” said Dacia; and then added suddenly, “Does not the sea sound very close?”

“It is close, for it is high tide, but it is far enough off for our purpose.”

“I hope so; but I have seen the sea up to the very foot of these hills when the tide has risen unusually high, which it frequently does here during stormy weather.”

There was no answer this time. A doubt began to take possession of Mostyn's mind also. He fancied he saw the large sheets of white foam within a few yards of them, and in another minute Sancho returned to his side like the dove to the ark; he had found the way impassable, and had warned his master of danger. What was to be done now? There was no possibility of gaining the town that way, if they were shut out by the sea from reaching the pier. To turn back and go round was the only alternative; and he believed Dacia would prove incapable of doing it. It was not alone the distance, but it was the terrible ground they had to go over; the sand so soft, that in many places every step they took they sank ankle-deep into it.

A few steps more—he was rather self-willed, and not convinced without proof of any thing—Hugh had fain to believe that Dacia's fears were correct. There rose the great huge waves like mountains before them, and bursting with such fury that the spray reached them and dashed in their faces. It was an awful sight, yet wondrously grand.

“God help those at sea to-night!” exclaimed Dacia, as she stood there, her hand still resting on Hugh’s arm, watching the water’s fury.

“She is not thinking of herself,” was Mostyn’s inward remark; “and yet she will have to battle against the wind on land, and I don’t know that she is better able than the poor creatures she prays for at sea.”

END OF VOL. I.

MESSRS. TINSLEY BROTHERS' NEW WORKS.

MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE AND REIGN OF GEORGE III.

By J. HENEAGE JESSE, Author of the "Court of England under the Stuarts," &c. 3 vols. 8vo.

THE REGENCY OF ANNE OF AUSTRIA, Queen Regnant of France, Mother of Louis XIV. By M. W. FREER, Author of the "Married Life of Anne of Austria." 2 vols. 8vo, with Portrait.

BIOGRAPHIES OF SOME CELEBRATED PEOPLE. By ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE. 2 vols. [Ready.]

TEN YEARS IN SARAWAK. By CHARLES BROOKE, the "Tuanmudah" of Sarawak. With an Introduction by H.H. the Rajah Sir JAMES BROOKE, and numerous Illustrations. Uniform with Captain Burton's "Mission to Dahomey." 2 vols. [Ready.]

THE HISTORY OF FRANCE UNDER THE BOURBONS. By CHARLES DUKE YONGE, Author of the "History of the Royal Navy." 2 vols. 8vo. [Ready.]

FROM CALCUTTA TO THE SNOWY RANGE. By an OLD INDIAN. 1 vol., with numerous coloured Illustrations. [Ready.]

THE EASTERN HUNTERS. By Captain JAMES NEWALL. 1 vol. 8vo, with numerous Illustrations. [Ready.]

New Work suitable for Students and Schools.

A COURSE OF ENGLISH LITERATURE. By JAS. HANNAY. 1 vol. [Ready.]

ARCHIE LOVELL. By the Author of "Miss Forrester," the "Morals of Mayfair," &c. 3 vols.

THE RACE FOR WEALTH. By Mrs. J. H. RIDDELL, Author of "George Geith," &c. 3 vols. Reprinted from "Once a Week." [Ready.]

THE SECOND MRS. TILLOTSON. By PERCY FITZGERALD, Author of "Bella Donna," "Jenny Bell," &c. 3 vols. [Ready.]

Reprinted from "All the Year Round."

New Novel by the Author of "East Lynne," &c.

ELSTER'S FOLLY. By Mrs. HENRY WOOD. 3 vols. [Ready.]

THE CO-HEIRESS. A Novel. By the Author of "Charlie Nugent," and "St. Aubyns of St. Aubyn." [Ready.]

KISSING THE ROD. A Novel. By EDMUND YATES, Author of "Running the Gauntlet." 3 vols. [Ready.]

LIZZIE LORTON OF GREYRIGG. A Novel. By Mrs. LYNN LINTON, Author of "Grasp your Nettle," the "Lake Country," &c. 3 vols.

The Cheap Edition of FACES FOR FORTUNES. By AUGUSTUS MAYHEW, Author of "Paved with Gold," &c. [Just ready.]

TOWN AND COUNTRY SKETCHES by ANDREW HALLIDAY, Author of "Sunnyside Papers," and uniform with "Modern Characteristics," is now ready at every library and at every railway stall in the kingdom, in 1 vol. handsomely bound in bevelled boards.

THREE HUNDRED A YEAR. A Novel. By the Hon. Mr.
HENRY WETLAND CHETWYND. 2 vols.

CARLETON GRANGE. A Novel. By the Author of "Abbot's
Cleve." 3 vols. [Ready.]

CHEAP EDITIONS OF POPULAR WORKS.

ST. MARTIN'S EVE. By Mrs. H. Wood, Author of "East
Lynne," &c. 6s.

SANS MERCI. By the Author of "Guy Livingstone," &c. 6s.

MAXWELL DREWITT. By the Author of "The Race for
Wealth," &c. 6s.

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET. By EDMUND YATES. 6s.

GEORGE GEITH. By the Author of "Maxwell Drewitt," &c. 6s.

MILDRED ARKELL. By the Author of "East Lynne." 6s.

HALF A MILLION OF MONEY. By the Author of "Bar-
bara's History," &c.

TOO MUCH ALONE. By the Author of "City and Suburb." 6s.

CITY AND SUBURB. By the Author of "George Geith," &c. 6s.

THE WORLD IN THE CHURCH. By the Author of "George
Geith." 6s.

TREVLYN HOLD. By the Author of "East Lynne," &c. 6s.

MISS FORRESTER. By the Author of the "Morals of May-
fair," &c. 6s.

DENIS DONNE. By ANNIE THOMAS, Author of "Theo Leigh,"
6s.

MAURICE DERING. By the Author of "Guy Livingstone,"
&c. 6s.

GUY LIVINGSTONE. By the Author of "Sword and Gown,"
&c. 5s.

BARREN HONOUR. By the Author of "Sword and Gown,"
&c. 6s.

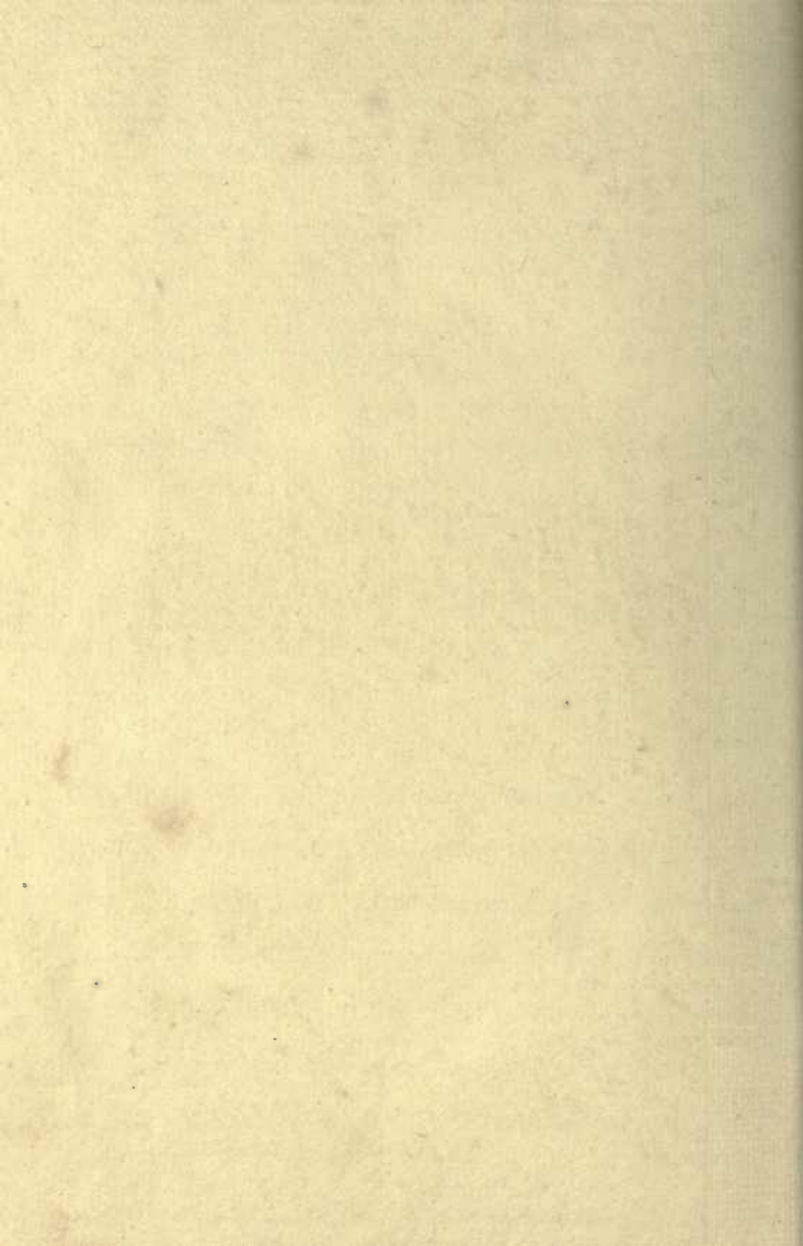
BORDER AND BASTILLE. By the Author of "Maurice
Dering." 6s.

SWORD AND GOWN. By the Author of "Guy Livingstone."
4s. 6d.

SEVEN SONS OF MAMMON. By GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA. 6s.

RECOMMENDED TO MERCY. 6s.





UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 098 093 8

